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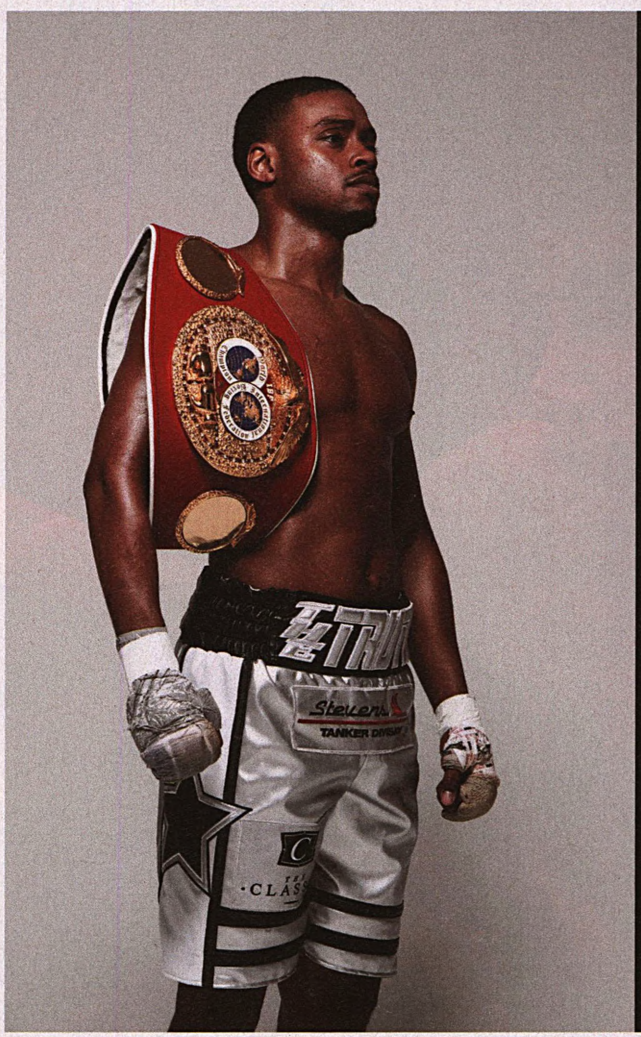

22 DARING TO BE GREAT
ERROL SPENCE JR. AND MIKEY GARCIA ARE RISKING A LOT BY FACING EACH OTHER, AND THAT'S THE WAY THEY LIKE IT
By Ron Borges

30 THE ART OF WARRINGTON
JOSH WARRINGTON'S CAREER IS FINALLY SOARING AFTER A BREAKOUT 2018
By Tom Gray

36 CANELO VS. JACOBS
DAZN PROMISED PPV-LEVEL FIGHTS AND DELIVERS WITH AN ENTICING MIDDLEWEIGHT UNIFICATION BOUT
By Doug Fischer

38 LORE OF THE RINGS
SIFTING FOR THE TRUTH IN SOME OF BOXING'S MOST ENDURING LEGENDS
By Don Stradley

42 DOING IT HIS WAY
LIGHTWEIGHT PROSPECT DEVIN HANEY IS POSITIONING HIMSELF TO BE THE NEXT BIG THING
By Michael Montero

46 A HOME AT THE TOP
JESSICA McCASKILL'S FEARLESS PURSUIT OF SUCCESS HAS ITS ROOTS IN HARD TIMES
By Thomas Gerbasi

Errol Spence is risking his IBF title and No. 1 welterweight ranking against Mikey Garcia, who is making a bold jump up in weight.

DEPARTMENTS

2 OPENING SHOT
4 COME OUT WRITING
7 RINGSIDE By Doug Fischer
8 FIGHTER OF THE MONTH
9 NEW FACES By Michael Woods
10 JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES By Thomas Hauser
12 BEST I FACED: MICHAEL CARBAJAL By Anson Wainwright
14 ENTER THE OCTAGON By Gareth A Davies
16 RING RATINGS PACKAGE
50 FIGHT REPORTS By Brian Harty
54 WORLD BEAT By The Ring
60 AT THE FIGHTS
62 FROM THE ARCHIVES
64 COMING UP

KENNETH CAPPELLO

COVER PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMANDA WESTCOTT

OPENING SHOT

Caleb Plant (left) kept his unblinking eyes on the prize against Jose Uzcategui throughout their super middleweight title bout, dropping the respected pressure fighter twice en route to a unanimous decision victory that earned him the IBF belt.

PHOTO BY JOHN MCCOY/GETTY IMAGES

NEW OLD SCHOOL

As a reader of The Ring magazine for some 60-odd years (whenever I could get my hands on one), I have two questions for your experts. One, who would be your pick as champion of each of the original eight weight divisions, and two, how do you think those fighters would fare against the champions of back in the 1960s?

Arnold Chinn
Westport, New Zealand

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Your question reminds us of a regular feature we once had called "Old School 8" where The Ring Editorial Board, and sometimes a guest, would boil down boxing's current 17 weight classes to the original eight and select a champion in each division. (Heavyweight includes the modern cruiserweight division, light heavyweight includes super middleweight, and all divisions middleweight through flyweight include the "junior" versions, with flyweight also encompassing the modern strawweights.) Here are Editor-In-Chief Doug Fischer's selections:

HEAVYWEIGHT: Anthony Joshua
LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: Eleider Alvarez
MIDDLEWEIGHT: Canelo Alvarez
WELTERWEIGHT: Terence Crawford
LIGHTWEIGHT: Vasiliy Lomachenko
FEATHERWEIGHT: Leo Santa Cruz
BANTAMWEIGHT: Naoya Inoue
FLYWEIGHT: Hiroto Kyoguchi

How would my excellent eight compete with their divisional counterparts from the 1960s? I believe they're good enough – maybe potentially great enough – to hold their own, but I favor the best of the '60s, such as Sonny Liston, Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier at heavyweight; Harold Johnson and Bob Foster at light heavyweight; Dick Tiger and Nino Benvenuti at middleweight; Emile Griffith, Luis Rodriguez and Curtis Cokes at welterweight; Carlos Ortiz and Ismael Laguna at lightweight; Davey Moore and Vicente Saldivar at featherweight; Eder Jofre and Fighting Harada at bantamweight; and Pone Kingpetch and Horacio Accavallo at flyweight.

However, given the versatile skillsets of Lomachenko and Crawford, the hard-nosed experience of Canelo and Santa Cruz, and the size and explosive athleticism of Joshua, Alvarez, Inoue and Kyoguchi, I can also envision the champs that I selected from this era (who benefit from previous-day weigh-ins and modern conditioning/nutrition methods) beating such '60s-era standouts as Ernie Terrell and Jimmy Ellis (heavyweight), Willie Pastrano and Tiger (light heavyweight), Joey Giardello and Griffith (middleweight), Gaspar Ortega and Charley Shipes (welterweight), Teo Cruz and Mando Ramos (lightweight), Raul Rojas and Howard Winstone (featherweight), Johnny Caldwell and Lionel Rose (bantamweight), and Efren Torres and Walter McGowan (flyweight). RING

TWEET OF THE MONTH

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The decorated Anthony Joshua has the size, skills and athleticism to have competed in any era.

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RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

POOR JUDGING SHOULDN'T ONLY COST THE FIGHTERS

An infamous presence was spotted ringside at the Manny Pacquiao-Adrien Broner fight. No, I'm not referring to Floyd Mayweather Jr. I'm talking about Nevada judge Adalaide Byrd, who worked the Hugo Ruiz-Alberto Guevara undercard bout.

Ruiz-Guevara was the 39th bout Byrd has worked since turning in her event-marring, sport-scarring 118-110 scorecard for Canelo Alvarez in the Mexican star's controversial 2017 draw with Gennady Golovkin.

This column isn't meant to rip Byrd. That's been done. But her activity since Canelo-Golovkin I is indicative of a long-standing problem within combat sports: the lack of accountability among professional judges.

Egregiously bad scoring generally goes unpunished by athletic commissions, which means we'll see it again, as we did late December with Larry Hazzard Jr.'s ludicrous 119-109 scorecard for Jermall Charlo's unanimous decision over Matvey Korobov and Levi Martinez's equally poor 118-110 tally for Donnie Nietes' split nod over Kazuto Ioka.

I'm not suggesting that Charlo or Nietes were undeserving of winning scorecards, just not by those ridiculous margins. Both fights were highly competitive. Most observers believed Charlo beat Korobov by a couple of points. Everyone I know who watched Nietes-Ioka thought it could have been a draw or gone either way by a point or two.

I know this is a cliché rhetorical question, but what fights were Hazzard and Martinez watching?

Years ago, a former flyweight contender named Willie Jensen asked me why boxing judges aren't required to take regular eye exams, as the fighters undergo, to test the quality of their vision.

Fair question, but even if the commissions tested judges' eyesight, such a measure would only address the problem of poor vision. What about poor judgment?

Promoter Tom Loeffler, who's been on the dookie-end of two recent dreadful scorecards (Byrd's and Martinez's 118-110 tallies), had a practical idea when I reminded him that Martinez awarded Canelo with a 117-111 score for the Erislandy Lara fight (another bout that could have gone either way by a point or two).

"Commissions should withhold payment to judges who turn in those kinds of scorecards unless they can adequately explain why they scored the fights so differently from the other judges and everybody else," Loeffler told me.

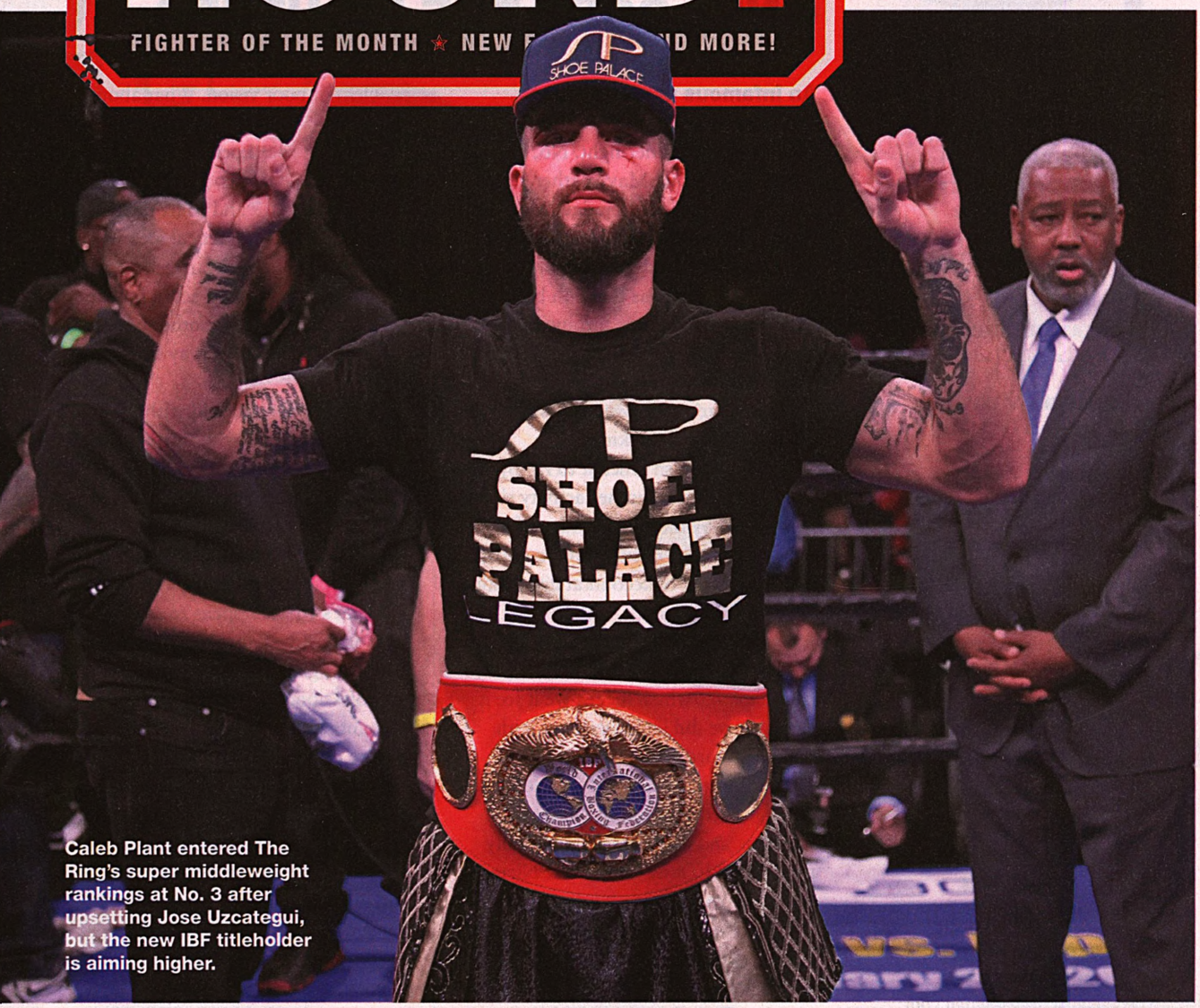
"That's what happens to a boxer if he or she gives absolutely no effort during a fight or does something really unprofessional. The boxers are held accountable for their actions because they're professionals.

"The judges assigned to these fights are supposed to be professionals, too. They are there to competently and fairly judge the boxing contest. The careers and livelihoods of the boxers sometimes hinge on how judges score a fight."

Tom's right, but the subjective nature of scoring and the cronyism of many state commissions "protect" inconsistent judges and awful scorecards. However, commissions can do the right thing.

The New Jersey State Athletic Control Board took responsibility for assigning the unqualified judges who botched the Paul Williams-Erislandy Lara fight by publicly admitting that the majority decision for Williams was bullshit, by indefinitely suspending all three, and by requiring the judges to undergo additional training prior to their return.

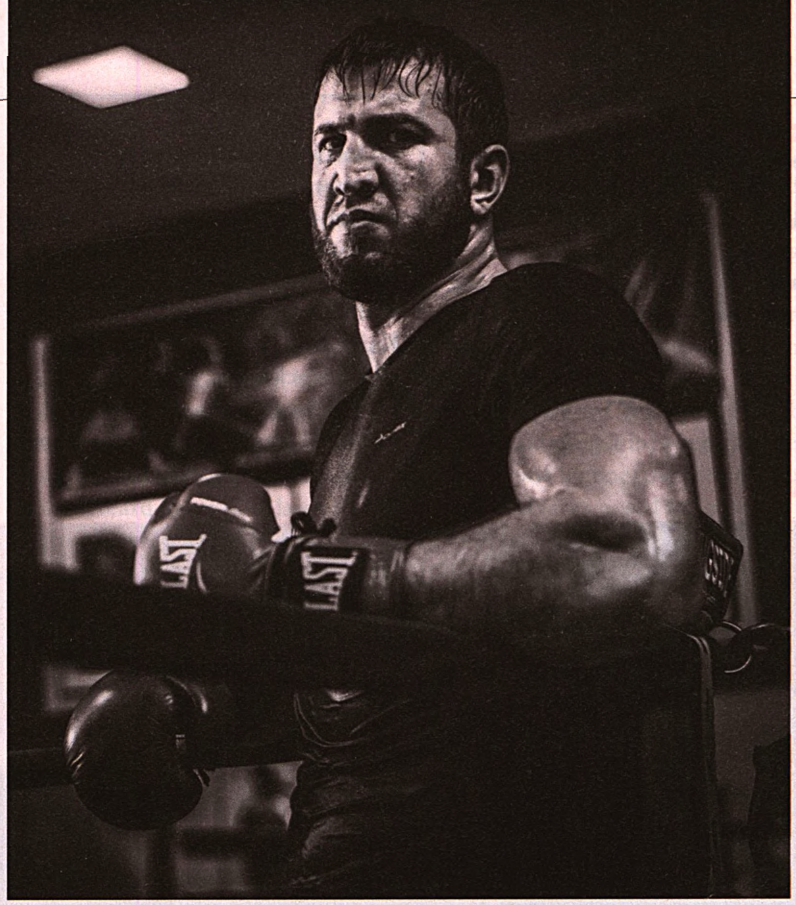
This was in 2011. I can't even count the number of controversial scorecards we've witnessed since. But I have to figure there would be fewer if more commissions held judges accountable.



Caleb Plant entered The Ring's super middleweight rankings at No. 3 after upsetting Jose Uzcategui, but the new IBF titleholder is aiming higher.

CALEB PLANT

Caleb Plant was an underdog with a poignant story going into his challenge for Jose Uzcategui's IBF super middleweight title. The 28-year-old Tennessee native had grown up poor and slogged it out for years chasing his dream of being a champion, even through the loss of his baby daughter. Stories are no protection in the ring, however, and sentimental favorite or not, he was facing a dangerous pressure fighter in Uzcategui, who'd become the interim titleholder after a beatdown of Andre Dirrell in March 2018 and assumed full status after James DeGale vacated. But it was evident very early in the fight that Plant had skills few had given him credit for. With fast hands, nimble feet and slick upper-body moves, the challenger stood with the puncher, made him miss and made him pay all night. He swept the first five rounds and put Uzcategui on the canvas twice – in Rounds 2 and 4, both times with left hooks – thus doubling the number of times his opponent had been down in his previous 30 fights and digging a hole that the Venezuelan would never get out of on the scorecards despite a late rally. Plant (18-0, 10 KOs) had played it hard in the build-up with near-contempt for Uzcategui's status, and he fought with the same disregard, but the bravado melted into emotion after the upset was announced: 116-110, 116-110 and 115-111, all in Plant's favor. At long last, he's the man in a division with no shortage of possible matchups. As a PBC fighter, promotional conflicts are always a risk, but with a belt now around his waist, Plant can finally sit back and let the other dreamers come to him.



Apti Davtaev is serious about becoming a force in the heavyweight division. Would you argue?

NEW FACES

APTI DAVTAEV

By **Michael Woods**

There is heavyweight boxing and there is everything else, a distant second.

OK, Team Canelo would perhaps beg to differ, being that the Mexican middleweight will soon start cashing checks from DAZN to the tune of more than $30 million per fight.

But by and large, especially in these United States, the heavyweights resonate. We simply have an affinity for the jumbo-sized items, don't we? Bigger is better.

So, way back when, promoter Dmitriy Salita's eyes lit up upon seeing a kickboxer named Jarrell Miller in a boxing ring and learning that "Big Baby" wanted to start using only his fists and not his feet as implements of warfare. Fast-forward four-plus years and Miller is on the cusp of getting a world title crack.

Salita isn't done yet; he's steadily carving a niche in New York and Michigan while collecting a solid array of talent, both known (Claressa Shields, Miller) and about-to-be-known.

Slot heavyweight Apti Davtaev into the latter category …

Davtaev grew up in the North Caucasus region of Russia and has two sisters and one older brother. Now 29, he's been boxing since he was 19 and looked up to a sterling role model as he pondered his path into adulthood: Muhammad Ali. "It was him that I was inspired by," said Davtaev, who now lives in Michigan and trains with Emanuel Steward's nephew, Javan "Sugar" Hill.

"I have been training in Detroit Kronk Gym with 'Sugar' Hill for close to a year now," Davtaev told The Ring through a translator. "I have made a lot of progress and am very grateful for this important experience that is taking my boxing to the next level. I consider my strength to be my will to win. To be a champion you have to have world-class skill and, like Muhammad Ali said, the will has got to be stronger than the skill."

Bottom line: Is he a future star?

"Definitely. This is my goal, to be a star and a dominant force in the heavyweight division," said the unbeaten (15-0-1, 14 knockouts) heavyweight, who was scheduled to face Richard Carmack on Feb. 15 at press time.

Salita of course sees in this still-to-be-more-refined hitter someone who will keep on improving to where he can hang and bang with Anthony Joshua or whoever else is atop the heavyweight heap in late 2019.

"The big boys excite boxing fans," said Salita. "And that is what the sport is about, especially today with competition for high-level content. With new platforms and fans across a broad spectrum of communities, people everywhere have the ability to support their favorite fighters. (Davtaev) is (unbeaten in 16 pro bouts), and numbers don't lie. (He's) training at Kronk Gym, a place that has produced great fighters and big punchers."

OK, but what does trainer Hill, not one to over-gush, say?

"I like him a lot," said Hill. "The reason a lot of the guys come over from Russia, that area, is they have talent, will and determination – they just lack the training. Once they get the training, they start to blossom."

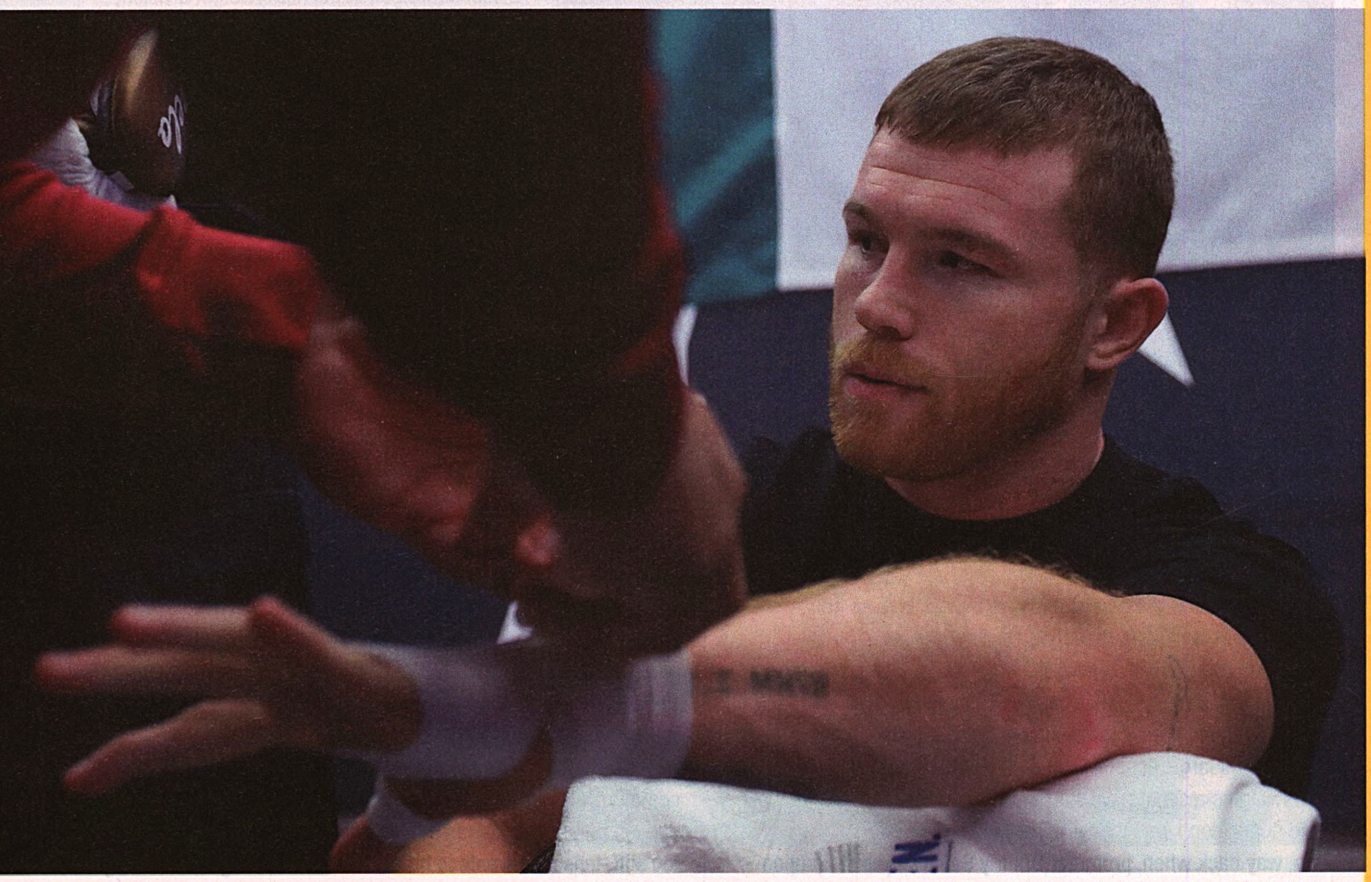
How has working with Davtaev gone? "The progress is a little slow, (due to) the language barrier, but now we're able to communicate better," said the trainer. "He does just a little English, enough to be understanding what he needs to work on. He's a little too stiff, tense; he wants to hit too hard. The last fight something just clicked, man. I'm happy where he is right now. He's ready for top sparring. He's a big, strong guy, not fully developed. I love that raw talent – we can create, like with clay. And his hunger stands out. (He has) a different-level hunger; (his) country is not as free as America – no money or exposure."

The 6-foot-5, 250-pound Davtaev can be seen on video possessing solid handspeed. He is a busy boxer and keeps his punches tight, not tending toward looping and leaving a lane for counterpunches. He will do well to listen to Hill when told to be active with his feet and keep those hands high, so as not to get tagged after launching. He mixes punches well, folding in uppercuts smartly. Foes will be made aware that his power is there, and he knows to ramp it up when he gets you in trouble.

Time will tell, and all elements will have to slot together. Davtaev will need to continue to progress, stay humble and open to tutoring, and stay healthy and hungry. Lots of ifs. But if stars stay aligned, the payoff could be immense. RING

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER



TOM HOGAN

THE INNER SANCTUM: CANELO ON FIGHT NIGHT

Canelo Alvarez was more relaxed prior to his fight against Rocky Fielding than he had been for the Gennady Golovkin rematch.

It's a long journey to Madison Square Garden from the Arena Chololo Larios in Tonala, Mexico, where 15-year-old Saul "Canelo" Alvarez made his debut as a professional fighter 13 years ago.

Canelo arrived at his dressing room for his December 15 fight against Rocky Fielding at 7:50 p.m. As an elite fighter, he'd been given the New York Knicks' changing room – part of a complex that includes a players lounge, video room, head coach's office, trainer's room, and multiple shower stalls.

The dressing room was round, 20 feet in diameter with recessed lighting above. Two imitation leather sofas and 14 black cushioned folding metal-framed chairs ringed a plush blue carpet with a large blue, orange and white Knicks logo emblazoned in the center. Backdrops with logos for Golden Boy, Tecate, and Alvarez stretched from just above the floor to the ceiling, blocking off the Knicks cubicles and wood-paneled walls. Two large Mexican flags had been hung facing each other.

Canelo's team included manager Chepo Reynoso, physical conditioner Munir Somoya, several videographers, and myriad camp aides, relatives, and friends. Those on the immediate team wore

maroon tracksuits with gold trim. Trainer Eddy Reynoso was in another room readying lightweight prospect Ryan Garcia for an undercard fight and would join them later.

Canelo lay down on one of the sofas with a towel beneath his head, took out his phone, and checked for messages. One of the backdrops was moved aside so he could watch the undercard fights on a large flat-screen television attached to the wall, but there was no DAZN signal.

Ramiro Gonzalez (Canelo's publicist and friend) handed Alvarez a smartphone with the DAZN app already downloaded so he could watch the action. Katie Taylor was en route to winning every round on each judge's scorecard against Eva Wahlstrom.

Chris Mannix came in to conduct an interview with Canelo for the DAZN stream.

"Do you want to do this in English?" Mannix asked.

"I understand," Canelo told him. "But I answer in Spanish. Is okay?"

It was okay.

When the interview was done, Canelo checked again for messages on his smartphone.

Almost no one in the room was talking. Those who did conversed in quiet tones.

Golden Boy president Eric Gomez came in and shook hands with everyone.

Five minutes later, Dr. Gerard Varlotta entered to administer the New York State Athletic Commission's standard fight-night physical examination. Canelo had a bit of swelling and a small scab beneath his right eye, the result of a recent sparring session. A more severe cut suffered above his left eye in the second Gennady Golovkin fight had healed.

"I had hair your color when I was young," Dr. Varlotta (whose nickname is Rusty) informed the fighter.

Canelo smiled.

The mood was far more relaxed than it had been in the dressing room prior to Canelo's most recent two fights against Golovkin.

At 8:40, Edith Marquez (a singer and actress who would sing the Mexican national anthem later in the evening) came in to wish Canelo well. Her gown demanded attention, and she got it. Chepo rose from his chair and sang a love song for her. Then, one by one, the members of Team Alvarez posed for pictures with her.

Canelo picked up Gonzalez's smartphone again. Ryan Garcia vs. Braulio Rodriguez had begun. At nine o'clock, the DAZN stream appeared on the flat-screen television.

More relatives, some with toddlers, came and went. Canelo hugged each of the arrivals, paying special attention to his daughter, Maria Fernanda. Three months earlier, an hour before his rematch against Golovkin, Canelo had walked Maria around his dressing room at the T-Mobile Arena, holding her arms above her head to steady her legs. Now she could take several steps on her own before losing her balance.

Garcia knocked Rodriguez out in Round 5. That was followed by Sadam Ali vs. Mauricio Herrera.

Referee Ricky Gonzalez entered and gave Alvarez his pre-fight instructions.

More well-wishers and sponsor representatives came and went.

Mexican legend Julio Cesar Chavez came in to conduct an interview with Canelo for Spanish-language television.

At 9:25, Eddy Reynoso began taping Canelo's hands. Nigel Travis, who was in the room as Rocky Fielding's representative, objected to what he argued was illegal stacking (layering gauze and tape in a forbidden way). The issue had been discussed (and presumably resolved) at a meeting with NYSAC director of boxing Matt Delaglio the previous day. Now executive director Kim Sumbler and deputy commissioner George Ward were called in to further resolve it. There was a slight adjustment to Canelo's hand wraps and Travis left grumbling.

Canelo lay down on a rubdown table. Soft Latin music sounded in the background. Munir Somoya stretched him out for 15 minutes. Then Canelo rose from the table and danced briefly with Chepo in his arms to laughter all around.

Oscar de La Hoya and Bernard Hopkins came in to wish Canelo well.

Canelo gloved up, then pounded a round black leather cushion that Eddy Reynoso was holding. By 10:40, he was ready for battle. But Tevin Farmer vs. Francisco Fonseca (the next-to-last fight of the evening) was only in Round 5.

Now Canelo was marking time. He paced and shadowboxed. There was some padwork. Farmer-Fonseca ended with Farmer winning a unanimous decision.

Three national anthems were next up on the DAZN stream. Canelo paced back and forth, rotating his arms during the singing of "God Save the Queen" and "The Star-Spangled Banner." But he stood at attention as Edith Marquez sang the Mexican anthem.

Earlier in the evening, as many as 40 people had been in the room. Now only Canelo, his cornermen, and two NYSAC inspectors remained.

At 11:30, three hours and 40 minutes after entering his dressing room, Canelo left for the ring. It was a fight he was expected to dominate. But once the bell rings, there are no guarantees in boxing.

Thomas Hauser's new email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Protect Yourself at All Times – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

BEST I FACED

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT

MICHAEL CARBAJAL

Michael Carbajal's up-from-the-canvas, come-from-behind KO of fellow 108-pound titleholder Humberto "Chiquita" Gonzalez was The Ring's 1993 Fight of the Year.

Simply put, Michael Carbajal was one of the greatest junior flyweights in history, winning five world titles at 108 pounds during a decade-long career. He was also a pioneer who brought attention to the lighter weight classes in the U.S. and paved the way for crowd favorites like Danny Romero, Johnny Tapia and Roman Gonzalez to be featured on premium cable.

Carbajal was born in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1967. He was one of nine children growing up in a crime-ridden area. "It was pretty tough; there were always shootings," he told The Ring of his early years. "Everything that I did was boxing, and it kept me away from trouble."

A 5-year-old Carbajal learned the basics from his father on the front porch and began his amateur career when he was 13. His unpaid career culminated with Olympic silver at the 1988 Games in South Korea.

"It was great," said Carbajal. "I didn't know how the Olympics would be. I was just fighting, and once I made the Olympics it was a great experience, because you're there with people from all over the world and you're meeting so many athletes from different sports and you're like, 'Wow.' I won silver and loved it. I have no regrets at all."

Carbajal left the amateurs with a record of 114-10 and signed with influential promoter Top Rank, making his professional debut on the undercard of his idol Roberto Duran's upset win over Iran Barkley in February 1989. Even Carbajal's nickname, "Manitas de Piedra" (Little Hands of Stone), was a tribute to his hero.

He moved quickly up the ladder as a pro and after just 17 months met unbeaten IBF titlist Muangchai Kittikasem in a bout televised live on ABC. Carbajal impressively stopped the tough Thai fighter in seven rounds to claim his first world title.

Over the next three years, Carbajal's star continued to ascend. He made six successful defenses of his belt before meeting WBC counterpart Humberto "Chiquita" Gonzalez in a March 1993 unification bout. The fight lived up to the lofty billing; Carbajal was down twice and behind on the scorecards before a spectacular rally enabled him to halt the Mexican in the seventh round. The shootout was named The Ring's Fight of the Year.

Carbajal made two successful defenses that same year before he and Gonzalez met again. In the rematch, Carbajal would earn an unprecedented million-dollar purse, but it was Gonzalez who used his considerable boxing skills to win a split decision.

The rubber match took place in the fall of 1994, and Gonzalez again outboxed Carbajal to win, this time by majority decision.

But Carbajal wasn't done. He won seven consecutive fights to earn a shot at the vacant IBF strap and outpointed tough veteran Melchor Cob Castro on the undercard of Frank Bruno-Mike Tyson II in Las Vegas.

After two defenses, Carbajal surprisingly dropped the title to unheralded Colombian Mauricio

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Pastrana. A loss to "Baby Jake" Matlala in July 1997 led to a 19-month hiatus.

Carbajal says he never had a problem with weight and stayed at 108 pounds his whole career. He was disenchanted with boxing, but he ultimately decided he didn't want to go out on the Matlala loss and returned determined to win one more world title.

"I told my late father, Manuel, I was going to become a world champion and retire a world champion," said Carbajal (49-4, 33 knockouts). "So I said, 'I've got to come back, I can't go out like this.' I had three fights, and then I again won the WBO world title against Jorge Arce. And I said, 'That's it for me. I'm not fighting anymore.' Arce went on to win five world titles (overall) in four weight classes, and that made me look even better. I'm happy with that."

Looking back, there are three moments that Carbajal is most proud of ... and one fight he would have liked to have had but didn't.

"(I'm most proud of) the Olympics of course, winning my first world title and also the first Chiquita fight," he said. "We made over a million dollars – the first junior flyweights ever to make that, and to this day not one flyweight has made near that much money.

"I would have loved to have fought Ricardo Lopez. They were talking about that fight, but it just never came to fruition. That would have been a great fight. Our styles were very similar, and that fight could have ended early. Lopez didn't want to ruin his perfect record with a loss."

In 2006, Carbajal was voted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

"I couldn't believe it; I started crying," he said of the moment he was informed of his induction. "I never thought about the Hall of Fame; I was just fighting 'cause I loved it. I was fighting to be a world champion, and everything came together with all the hard work and training I did."

Carbajal, now 52, has four children and lives with his long-term girlfriend, Laura, in the same house he grew up in. He owns Michael Carbajal's 9th Street Gym in Phoenix and stays busy with appearances and speaking engagements.

He graciously took time to speak to The Ring about the best he fought in 10 key categories.

BEST JAB

MUANGCHAI KITTIKASEM: His (orthodox) jab felt like a right hand; his jab was magnificent. He had a really stiff jab.

BEST DEFENSE

DOMINGO SOSA: He moved around a lot; that's the only reason why.

BEST HAND SPEED

HUMBERTO "CHIQUITA" GONZALEZ: He was left-handed and he was awkward. He came from all angles. I couldn't really see his punches. The first fight was the one where he had really good hand speed.

BEST FOOTWORK

ROBINSON CUESTA: That's between Robinson Cuesta and Domingo Sosa. Cuesta had good movement. He was a real tall fighter – most of the guys I fought were shorter; he was a lot taller than I was. Sosa had the same amount of footwork, but it really didn't bother me as much as Cuesta, because he didn't want to go right in like Cuesta because of his power. I'd have to say Cuesta.

STRONGEST

KITTIKASEM: Physically, I would say Kittikasem. He was a big junior flyweight, and also he was a very hard puncher. He was tough to move backwards.

SMARTEST

GONZALEZ: He fought a whole different style, 'cause the first fight he came forward. After the first fight, he never came forward. I thought that was very smart of him. He was a better boxer than a lot of people thought.

BEST PUNCHER

GONZALEZ: Chiquita's power was totally different. If you watched the fight, he hit me straight with the right hook right on the jaw. He could really punch. Arce had different power; he didn't have the kind of power of Chiquita or Kittikasem. I saw the power more in the first fight (against Gonzalez), because in the second and third fights he didn't put himself in harm's way.

BEST CHIN

JAVIER VARGUEZ: He just took everything I had. That was a tough fight. Mauricio Pastrana and Melchor Cob Castro had good chins, but not like Varguez, because he stood with you the whole 12 rounds.

BEST BOXING SKILLS

MELCHOR COB CASTRO: He knew what he was doing inside the ring; he knew when to move and when to come in and out. Cob Castro and Chiquita are about the same, but Chiquita had much more power.

BEST OVERALL

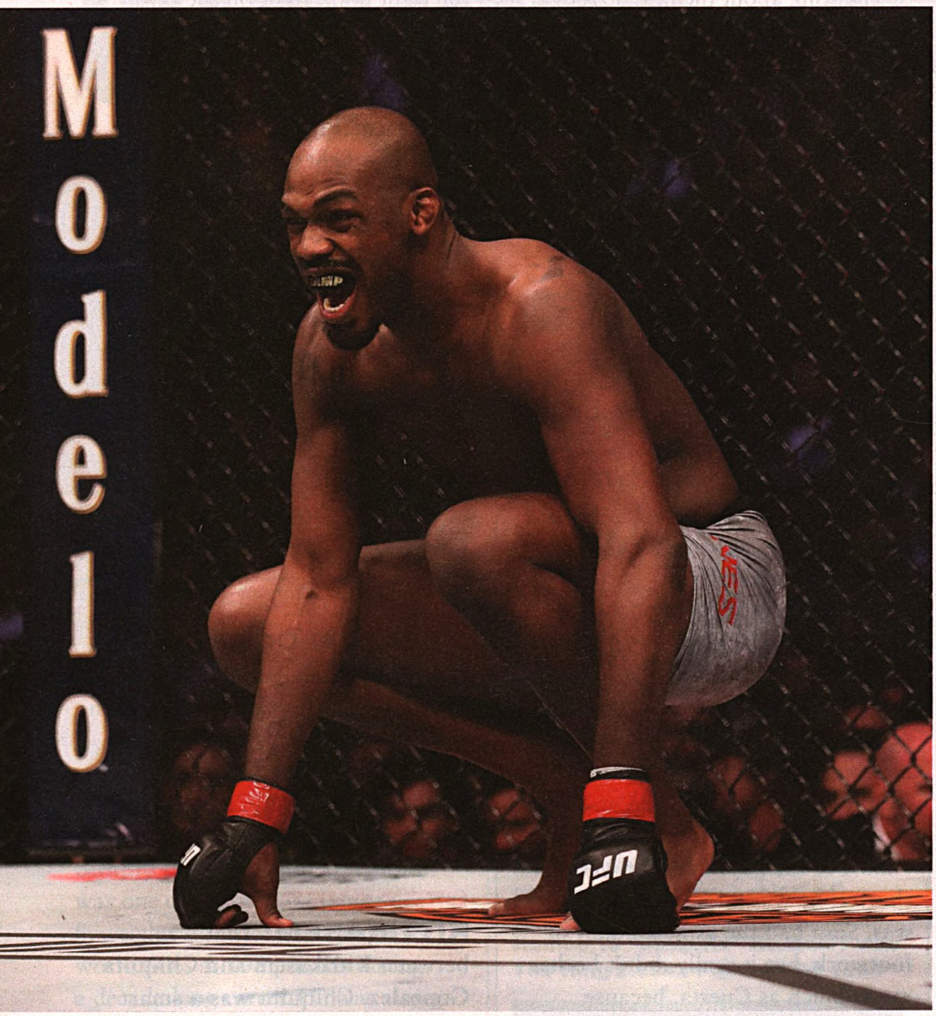
KITTIKASEM: That was between Kittikasem and Chiquita Gonzalez. Chiquita was a smart fighter and could punch, but Kittikasem was a really big guy, he could punch and also he had great boxing skills and he moved up the weight classes. I've got to give it to Kittikasem.

Laura Hall helped coordinate this feature. The Ring appreciates her assistance.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

ENTER THE OCTAGON

BY GARETH A DAVIES



LOVE OR LOATHE JON JONES, THE MMA'S DIRTY SECRET IS THE G.O.A.T.

Jon Jones is a brilliant fighter – and a UFC champion again, after dismantling Alexander Gustafsson in their second encounter to headline the traditional New Year's closer that has become a must-see event. Jones looked utterly brilliant, smothering the Swede's dangerous striking to reclaim the belt the UFC opened up for him.

Yet we avert our gaze, look away, brush under the carpet the dark cloud that is like a family secret. The newly installed light heavyweight king remains a divisive figure because he is a convicted drugs cheat.

Because he is so good, because he is arguably the greatest fighter ever in this very young sport, so many still crave seeing him fight. But he is the current litmus test of our ethics and morality in the sport.

In December, ahead of his scheduled fight with Gustafsson in Las Vegas, the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) tested Jones and found a trace of DHCMT, also known as Turinabol, in the New Yorker's body. The Nevada Athletic Commission (NAC) rightly announced that it was unable to license the fighter in its state. The trace amount of the drug was described as a "pulsing" effect; USADA reasoned it was still in Jones' system from his 2017 positive test that had led to a 15-month suspension in the first place. But no one knew what to believe. Or whether it was plausible that this banned substance, which is an anabolic–androgenic steroid, showed up in his body months and months later by chance. No one even understands the science. We were

Jon Jones regained the UFC light heavyweight title with a third-round stoppage of Alexander Gustafsson at UFC 232.

SEAN M. HAFFEY

left to draw our own conclusions.

But Jones would go ahead and fight after the UFC moved the event – lock, stock and smoking barrels – to the Forum in Inglewood, California, where the California State Athletic Commission (CSAC) licensed it. Never has a fight event been more transparent as a business rather than a sport. Well, maybe Floyd Mayweather vs. Conor McGregor was, too... but the venue was filled, and we all watched.

The question is whether Jones should have been fighting at all. Ethically, should we/USADA/UFC be granting Jones redemption for a third time? (Yes, *third* time.) "No" has to be the right answer. It remains MMA's greatest dilemma. When money speaks, flaws become visible. And Jones, our dirty secret, is up again on March 2, this time against a new challenger in Anthony Smith in Las Vegas.

What we all want to see is Jones against Daniel Cormier at heavyweight. Champ and champ, a trilogy, and bad blood. It's 2-0 to Jones already at light heavyweight. Cormier is reluctant, but it remains one of the most intriguing fights out there. Huge stakes, mega money, guaranteed seller. But is it guaranteed that Jones will test clean? God only knows.

It's worth recording, too, that on that December 29 card, Amanda Nunes became the greatest female fighter of all time when she blew away fellow Brazilian Cris "Cyborg" Santos in a first-round shootout. Nunes won the featherweight crown to add to her bantamweight belt, and in doing so joined Cormier as a two-weight world champion. Indeed, just as Conor McGregor did at featherweight and lightweight.

★ ★ ★

OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST HENRY CEJUDO VICTORY 'SAVES' UFC FLYWEIGHT DIVISION

They say Henry Cejudo succeeded in saving the UFC flyweight division in mid-January by defeating TJ Dillashaw, the UFC's bantamweight champion, via first-round TKO in the 125-pound headliner in Brooklyn. It took him 32 seconds. It was a devastating victory, the Olympic wrestling gold medalist upsetting the odds in that first stanza – clipping Dillashaw early, dropping him and offering a bombardment until the referee stopped the contest. Dillashaw protested it was an early stoppage, as did UFC president Dana White, but the result stands.

In the lead-up to the superfight, Cejudo had expressed his opinion that he was fighting for the future of the division. Had he lost, the flyweight class may have been abandoned by the fight promotion, at least temporarily.

"I did this for the flyweights. I hope I did enough to keep the flyweight division alive," said Cejudo during his post-fight interview. The champion also offered to move up to bantamweight (135 pounds) to challenge for Dillashaw's remaining title.

Elsewhere on the card, two fighters captured the week's news headlines for other forms of fighting of the ugliest kind. Former NFL defensive end Greg Hardy – a man once convicted of assaulting his ex-girlfriend (though the charges were dismissed on appeal) – made his official UFC debut. He was scheduled to compete on the same card as Rachael Ostovich, who had suffered a broken orbital bone during an alleged attack by her husband in recent months. It was seen as insensitive and thoughtless promoting. But looked at another way, it highlighted the issues of domestic violence. Put the issues out in the open.

Both lost, by the way. Hardy showed his inexperience and was disqualified for an outrageous illegal knee strike when his opponent, Allen Crowder, was down. Fan-favorite Paige VanZant submitted the Hawaiian Ostovich with an armbar halfway through the second round. Despite the criticism the UFC received for the double feature, during fight week Ostovich revealed that she took a moment to clear the air with Hardy.

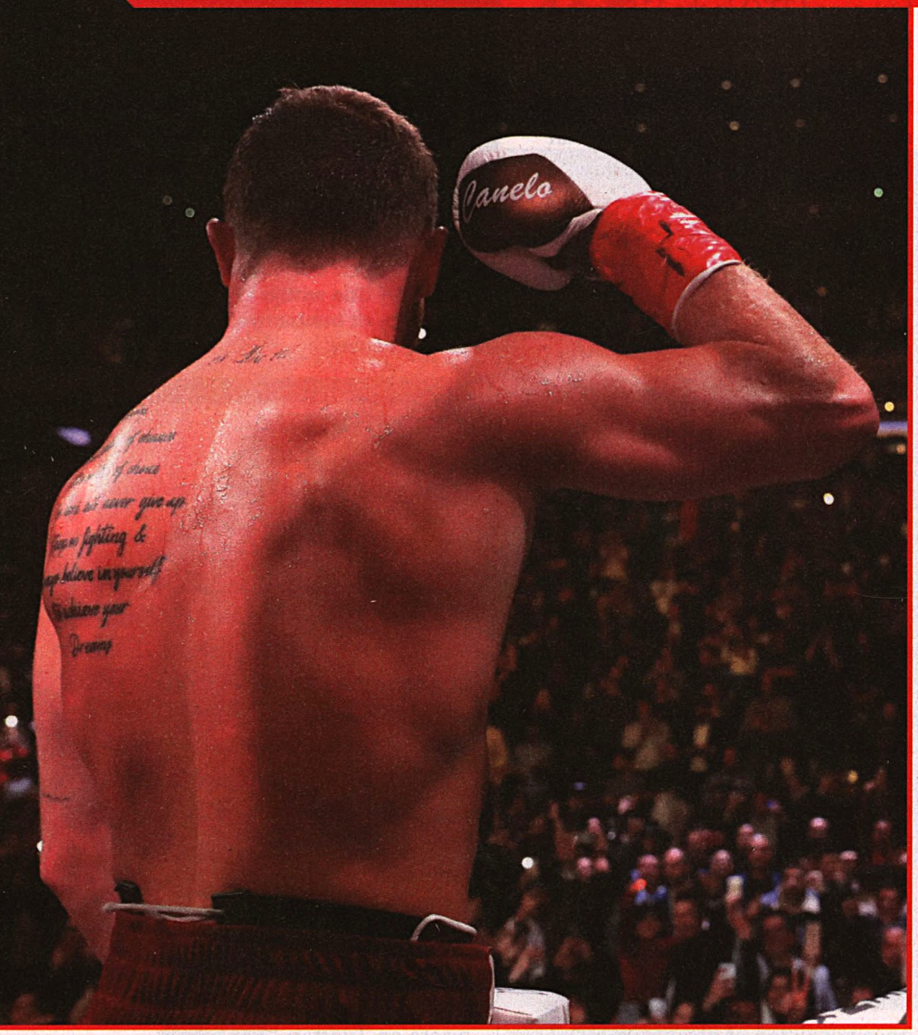
Henry Cejudo defended his UFC flyweight title with a first-round stoppage of bantamweight champ T.J. Dillashaw.

There are few events at which McGregor does not have some kind of presence. Donald "Cowboy" Cerrone beat Alexander Hernandez on the Cejudo-Dillashaw preliminary card and then called out the Irishman, who seemed to accept the challenge on his social media platform. McGregor wrote on Twitter: "For a fight like that Donald, I'll fight you. Congratulations."

White said McGregor was "willing to fight anyone" after his loss to Khabib Nurmagomedov, the UFC's biggest event of 2018. The Dagestani star's coach, Javier Mendez, suggested that a rematch (after the ugly scenes in the build-up and after the fight last summer in Las Vegas) could take place at AT&T Stadium in Texas in July. Sign 'em up. We all want to see it again, warts and all.

Gareth A Davies is MMA Correspondent for The London Telegraph.

RATINGS



Canelo Alvarez proved he has fans in New York City when his Madison Square Garden debut against Rocky Fielding attracted more than 20,000.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)

2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 34-0-0 (25 KOs)

3 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)

4 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

5 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)

6 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)

7 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)

8 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)

9 **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)

10 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND: It was a close one, but Donnie Nietes snagged a belt in a fourth division with a split decision over junior bantamweight Kazuto Ioka, who has himself held titles in multiple weight classes. As a result, Nietes (No. 10 last month) switched places with No. 9-rated Errol Spence Jr.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: The rematch of 2016's Fight of the Year candidate between Dillian Whyte and Dereck Chisora seemed destined to be another terrific 12-rounder when Whyte, who edged the first fight by split decision, scored a genuine flat-on-the back knockout with a left hook in the 11th. Chisora was unranked, but Whyte rose from No. 5 to No. 4 with the win.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Sweden's Sven Fornling (unrated last month) stumbled at the finish line with a last-round knockdown, but did enough to outpoint German veteran Karo Murat, whom he replaced at No. 10.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Canelo Alvarez stepped up to 168 and made easy work of Rocky Fielding (No. 9 last month) with a third-round stoppage. Canelo came in at No. 4 but also maintained his championship status back down at 160, where he'll defend against Daniel Jacobs in May, so for the time being he's the rare two-division rankee. Fielding dropped out. Jesse Hart (No. 10 last month) was then pushed out by the arrival of Tennessee native Caleb Plant, who stormed into the ratings at No. 3 with a clear-cut upset of Jose Uzcategui, who fell to No. 8 after losing by unanimous decision.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Hassan N'Dam took 14 months off after losing to Ryota Murata in October 2017, but he got back in the saddle with a majority decision over Martin Murray (unranked) and replaced Kamil Szeremeta at No. 10.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Tony Harrison (unrated last month) posted an early candidate for Upset of the Year with a close but unanimous

TOM HOGAN

Dillian Whyte cracked the top five of The Ring's heavyweight rankings with his one-punch KO of Dereck Chisora in Round 11 of their rematch.

decision over fellow American Jermell Charlo. Harrison took possession of Charlo's belt and entered the list at No. 4 while Charlo sank from No. 2 to No. 5 and No. 10-rated Liam Smith was bumped out.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: Devin Haney rose from No. 8 to No. 7 with an impressive near-shutout of the hitherto undefeated Xolisani Ndongeni (unrated).

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: No change.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: You'll read more about it in the coming pages, but Josh Warrington defended his title with another legacy-building win, this time a UD over Carl Frampton. Warrington jumped from No. 6 into the No. 2 spot while Frampton slipped from No. 3 to No. 5.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: No change.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: Takuma Inoue (No. 9 last month) honored the family name (he's Naoya's younger brother) with a wide unanimous decision over Petch Sor Chitpattana (who was unrated but hadn't lost any of his 48 pro fights) and was promoted to No. 8.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Nietes' narrow victory over Ioka took him from No. 7 to No. 2 while the Japanese former titleholder dropped from No. 3 to No. 4.

FLYWEIGHTS: In a month of upsets, Charlie Edwards (unrated last month) joined the club with a unanimous decision over Cristofer Rosales, who himself had ripped the WBC belt from Daigo Higa in the 2018 Upset of the Year. Edwards' arrival knocked No. 10-rated Junto Nakatani off the list and Rosales dropped two notches to No. 7. The new No. 10, Wenfeng Ge, was then displaced by the Philippines' Giemel Magramo, who handed the Chinese fighter his first loss with a 10th-round stoppage.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: Not really an upset, because he was in with a rising beast and is clearly feeling the effects of his 30 years, but Hekkie Budler lost his Ring championship to Hiroto Kyoguchi (No. 6 last month) via TKO in the 10th round. The popular South African dropped to No. 2 as a result.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ANTHONY JOSHUA** U.K. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2 TYSON FURY** U.K. • 27-0-1 (19 KOs)
- **3 DEONTAY WILDER** U.S. • 40-0-1 (39 KOs)
- **4 DILLIAN WHYTE** U.K. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **5 LUIS ORTIZ** Cuba • 30-1-0 (26 KOs)
- **6 ALEXANDER POVETKIN** Russia • 34-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **7 JOSEPH PARKER** New Zealand • 25-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **8 JARRELL MILLER** U.S. • 23-0-1 (20 KOs)
- **9 ADAM KOWNACKI** U.S. • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 KUBRAT PULEV** Bulgaria • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

- **C ALEKSANDR USYK** Ukraine • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS** Latvia • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **2 MURAT GASSIEV** Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **3 YUNIER DORTICOS** Cuba • 23-1-0 (21 KOs)
- **4 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** Poland • 31-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 DENIS LEBEDEV** Russia • 32-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **6 ANDREW TABITI** U.S. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **7 MAKSIM VLASOV** Russia • 42-3-0 (25 KOs)
- **8 KEVIN LERENA** S. Africa • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **9 ILUNGA MAKABU** Congo • 24-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **10 ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** France • 24-0-0 (16 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ELEIDER ALVAREZ** Colombia • 24-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **2 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** Ukraine • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **3 DMITRY BIVOL** Russia • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **4 BADOU JACK** Sweden • 22-1-3 (13 KOs)
- **5 SERGEY KOVALEV** Russia • 32-3-1 (28 KOs)
- **6 ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 13-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **7 SULLIVAN BARRERA** Cuba • 22-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **8 MARCUS BROWNE** U.S. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **9 JOE SMITH JR.** U.S. • 24-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **10 SVEN FORNLING** Sweden • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

- **C CALLUM SMITH** U.K. • 25-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **1 GILBERTO RAMIREZ** Mexico • 39-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **2 DAVID BENAVIDEZ** U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **3 CALEB PLANT** U.S. • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **4 CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)
- **5 GEORGE GROVES** U.K. • 28-4-0 (20 KOs)
- **6 JAMES DEGALE** U.K. • 25-2-1 (15 KOs)
- **7 ANTHONY DIRRELL** U.S. • 32-1-1 (24 KOs)
- **8 JOSE UZCATEGUI** Venezuela • 28-3-0 (23 KOs)
- **9 CHRIS EUBANK JR.** U.K. • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **10 CALEB TRUAX** U.S. • 30-4-2 (19 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 13, 2019

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

- **C CANELO ALVAREZ** Mexico • 51-1-2 (35 KOs)
- **1 GENNADY GOLOVKIN** Kaz. • 38-1-1 (34 KOs)
- **2 DANIEL JACOBS** U.S. • 35-2-0 (29 KOs)
- **3 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** U.K. • 27-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **4 ROB BRANT** U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **5 DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** U.S. • 26-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **6 JERMALL CHARLO** U.S. • 28-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **7 SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO** Ukraine • 12-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **8 DAVID LEMIEUX** Canada • 40-4-0 (34 KOs)
- **9 MACIEJ SULECKI** Poland • 27-1-0 (11 KOs)
- **10 HASSAN N'DAM** France • 37-3-0 (21 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 JARRETT HURD** U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **2 ERISLANDY LARA** Cuba • 25-3-2 (14 KOs)
- **3 JAIME MUNGUIA** Mexico • 31-0-0 (26 KOs)
- **4 TONY HARRISON** U.S. • 28-2-0 (21 KOs)
- **5 JERMELL CHARLO** U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- **6 BRIAN CASTANO** Argentina • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **7 MICHEL SORO** France • 33-2-1 (22 KOs)
- **8 JULIAN WILLIAMS** U.S. • 26-1-1 (16 KOs)
- **9 KELL BROOK** U.K. • 38-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **10 AUSTIN TROUT** U.S. • 31-5-0 (17 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ERROL SPENCE** U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2 TERENCE CRAWFORD** U.S. • 34-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **3 KEITH THURMAN** U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **4 SHAWN PORTER** U.S. • 29-2-1 (17 KOs)
- **5 MANNY PACQUIAO** Phil. • 60-7-2 (39 KOs)
- **6 DANNY GARCIA** U.S. • 34-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **7 EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS** Lithuania • 21-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **8 YORDENIS UGAS** Cuba • 23-3-0 (11 KOs)
- **9 JEFF HORN** Australia • 19-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **10 JESSIE VARGAS** U.S. • 28-2-2 (10 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 REGIS PROGRAIS** U.S. • 23-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **2 JOSH TAYLOR** U.K. • 14-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **3 JOSE RAMIREZ** U.S. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **4 KIRYL RELIKH** Belarus • 23-2-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 MAURICE HOOKER** U.S. • 25-0-3 (17 KOs)
- **6 IVAN BARANCHYK** Russia • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7 VIKTOR POSTOL** Ukraine • 30-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **8 SERGEY LIPINETS** Russia • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
- **9 EDUARD TROYANOVSKY** Russia • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **10 ANTONIO OROZCO** U.S. • 27-1-0 (17 KOs)

Jermall Charlo had to work harder than expected to remain unbeaten against late-sub Matvey Korobov.

Jermell Charlo wasn't as successful as his twin, losing his WBC 154-pound title to Tony Harrison.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

- **C VASILIY LOMACHENKO** Ukraine • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **1 MIKEY GARCIA** U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **2 ROBERT EASTER** U.S. • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **3 RICHARD COMMEY** Ghana • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
- **4 ANTHONY CROLLA** U.K. • 34-6-3 (13 KOs)
- **5 LUKE CAMPBELL** U.K. • 19-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6 JOSE PEDRAZA** P.R. • 25-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **7 DEVIN HANEY** U.S. • 21-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **8 RAYMUNDO BELTRAN** Mexico • 35-8-1 (21 KOs)
- **9 EMMANUEL TAGOE** Ghana • 29-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 FRANCESCO PATERA** Belgium • 20-3-0 (7 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 MIGUEL BERCHELT** Mexico • 35-1-0 (31 KOs)
- **2 GERVONTA DAVIS** U.S. • 20-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **3 TEVIN FARMER** U.S. • 28-4-1 (6 KOs)
- **4 ALBERTO MACHADO** P.R. • 21-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **5 FRANCISCO VARGAS** Mexico • 25-1-2 (18 KOs)
- **6 MASAYUKI ITO** Japan • 25-1-1 (13 KOs)
- **7 MIGUEL ROMAN** Mexico • 60-13-0 (47 KOs)
- **8 EDUARDO HERNANDEZ** Mexico • 27-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **9 SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV** Russia • 13-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **10 LAMONT ROACH JR.** U.S. • 18-0-1 (7 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 LEO SANTA CRUZ** U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
- **2 JOSH WARRINGTON** U.K. • 28-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **3 GARY RUSSELL JR.** U.S. • 29-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **4 OSCAR VALDEZ** Mexico • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
- **5 CARL FRAMPTON** U.K. • 26-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **6 ABNER MARES** Mexico • 31-3-1 (15 KOs)
- **7 JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** U.S. • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **8 LEE SELBY** U.K. • 26-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **9 SCOTT QUIGG** U.K. • 35-2-2 (26 KOs)
- **10 JESUS ROJAS** P.R. • 26-2-2 (19 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX** Cuba • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **2 REY VARGAS** Mexico • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3 EMANUEL NAVARRETE** Mexico • 26-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **4 DANIEL ROMAN** U.S. • 26-2-1 (10 KOs)
- **5 ISAAC DOGBOE** Ghana • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **6 JESSIE MAGDALENO** U.S. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **7 DIEGO DE LA HOYA** Mexico • 21-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **8 TJ DOHENY** Australia • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **9 TOMOKI KAMEDA** Japan • 36-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **10 RYOSUKE IWASA** Japan • 25-3-0 (16 KOs)

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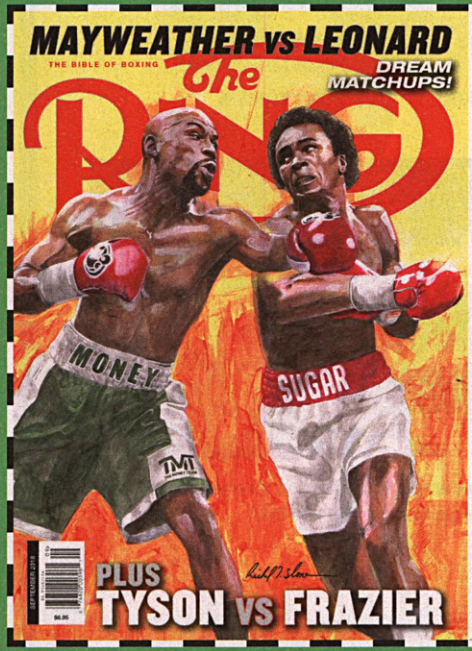

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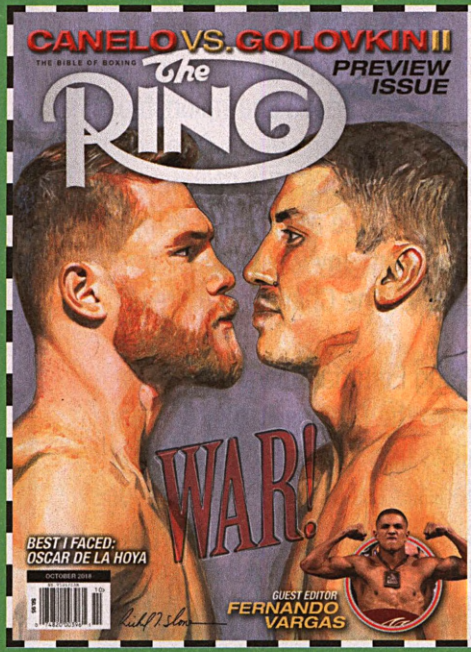

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RATINGS

Through fights of Jan. 13, 2019

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 NAOYA INOUE
Japan • 17-0-0 (15 KOs)
2 ZOLANI TETE
S. Africa • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
3 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
P.R. • 19-0-0 (12 KOs)
4 NONITO DONAIRE
Philippines • 39-5-0 (25 KOs)
5 RYAN BURNETT
U.K. • 19-1-0 (9 KOs)
6 LUIS NERY
Mexico • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
7 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)
8 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)
9 NORDINE OUBAALI
France • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
10 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 37-3-1 (27 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 47-4-1 (41 KOs)
1 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 38-3-0 (26 KOs)
2 DONNIE NIETES
Philippines • 42-1-5 (23 KOs)
3 KHALID YAFAI
U.K. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
4 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 23-2-0 (13 KOs)
5 JERWIN ANCAJAS
Phil. • 30-1-2 (20 KOs)
6 ROMAN GONZALEZ
Nicaragua • 47-2-0 (39 KOs)
7 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
8 RAU'SHEE WARREN
U.S. • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
9 ASTON PALICTE
Philippines • 24-2-1 (20 KOs)
10 MCWILLIAMS ARROYO
P.R. • 17-4-0 (14 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 MORUTI MTHALANE
S. Africa • 37-2-0 (25 KOs)
2 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 12-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
4 ANDREW SELBY
U.K. • 11-0-0 (6 KOs)
5 CHARLIE EDWARDS
U.K. • 14-1-0 (6 KOs)
6 SHO KIMURA
Japan • 17-2-2 (10 KOs)
7 CRISTOFER ROSALES
Nicaragua • 28-4-0 (19 KOs)
8 MASAYUKI KURODA
Japan • 30-7-3 (16 KOs)
9 VINCENT LEGRAND
France • 29-0-0 (17 KOs)
10 GIEMEL MAGRAMO
Philippines • 23-1-0 (19 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C HIROTO KYOGUCHI
Japan • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 KEN SHIRO
Japan • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 HEKKIE BUDLER
S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)
3 RYOICHI TAGUCHI
Japan • 27-3-2 (12 KOs)
4 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
5 ANGEL ACOSTA
P.R. • 19-1-0 (19 KOs)
6 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 34-2-0 (30 KOs)
7 REY LORETO
Phil. • 24-14-0 (16 KOs)
8 MILAN MELINDO
Phil. • 37-4-0 (13 KOs)
9 EDWARD HENO
Phil. • 13-0-5 (5 KOs)
10 REIYA KONISHI
Japan • 17-1-0 (7 KOs)

Takuma Inoue continued to climb the bantamweight rankings with a decision over Petch Sor Chitpattana.

Donnie Nietes (right) became a four-division titleholder with a hotly contested split decision over Kazuto Ioka.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 WANHENG MENAYOTHIN
Thailand • 52-0-0 (18 KOs)
3 BYRON ROJAS
Nicaragua • 25-4-3 (11 KOs)
4 VIC SALUDAR
Philippines • 18-3-0 (10 KOs)
5 SIMPHIWE KHONCO
S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
6 JOSE ARGUMEDO
Mexico • 22-4-1 (13 KOs)
7 TSUBASA KOURA
Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)
8 CARLOS LICONA
U.S. • 14-0-0 (2 KOs)
9 TATSUYA FUKUHARA
Japan • 21-6-6 (7 KOs)
10 DEEJAY KRIEL
S. Africa • 14-1-1 (6 KOs)

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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

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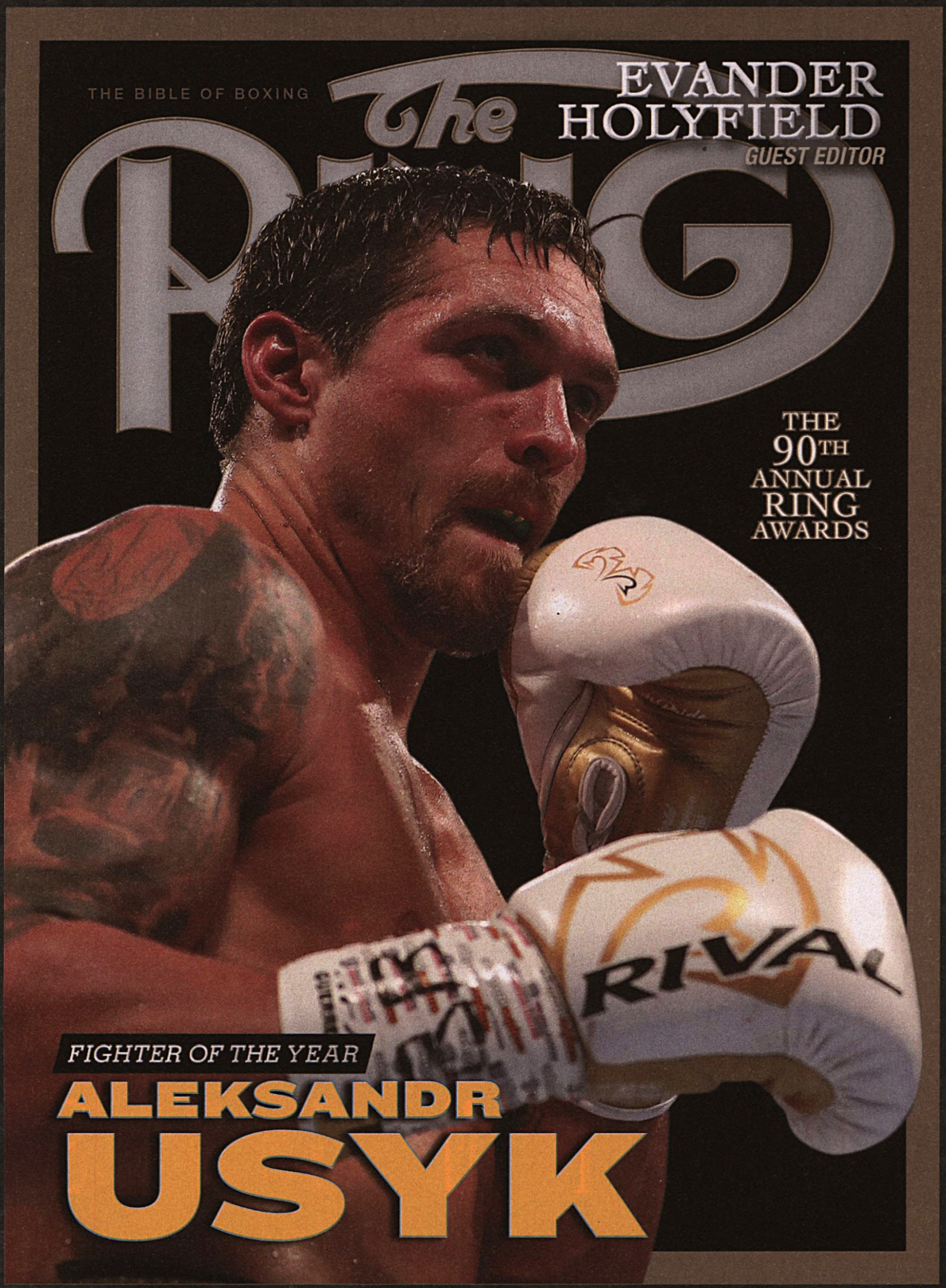

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DARING TO BE GREAT

IN AGREEING TO FACE EACH OTHER, **MIKEY GARCIA AND ERROL SPENCE JR.** HAVE PUT THEIR PERFECT RECORDS, REPUTATIONS AND PRIDE ON THE LINE – AND NEITHER WOULD HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY By **Ron Borges**

AMANDA WESTCOTT

Errol Spence Jr. and Mikey Garcia are pursuing greatness, which is why they are pursuing each other. It is a pursuit fraught with danger, a risk both accept knowing it is the cost of becoming something more than just another fighter wearing a title belt.

In this day and age, there is no end to "champions." Once, there were eight weight classes and one recognized titleholder in each. It was universally

Spence's height and size advantages over Garcia were evident from their first media-event staredown in late 2018.

LEON BENNETT

known who the champion was, and everyone else pursued him because the road to greatness was clear. It passed through whomever held that belt. Today, it is a far different landscape. Boxing is as fractured as if the San Andreas Fault had finally cracked and sent half of California tumbling into the sea.

There are 17 weight classes today, but that is only the beginning. Depending on how many sanctioning organizations you care to acknowledge, there are between one and six of them handing out belts (The Ring only recognizes the WBC, WBA, IBF and WBO, but there are also the IBO and IBA), which leaves you with between 17 and 102 champions ... and that's if you exclude "interim champions" (aren't they all?), "regular" champions and "champions in recess."

It is a staggering number that has rendered the word "champion" often meaningless and always difficult to quantify. It is why some fighters have come to the conclusion that they must define themselves rather than allowing someone's belt to do it for them, which brings us to Spence and Garcia.

The Ring's 147-pound championship is currently vacant, but there are at the moment five welterweight "world titleholders." There is Spence, who holds the IBF title; the oft-MIA Keith Thurman, who is the WBA "super" champion; Shawn Porter, the WBC beltholder, Terence Crawford, who wears the WBO strap, and the IBO's Thulani Mbenge. (Future Hall of Famer Manny Pacquiao holds the WBA's secondary or "regular" title, and the IBA title is vacant.) With so many titleholders, it is left to fans, the media and tweeting boxers themselves to declare who the true champion is – and many believe it is Spence, the undefeated (24-0, 21 knockouts) Texan who has speed, power, size and supreme belief in himself and his skills.

Garcia, on the other hand, has already won titles in four weight divisions from featherweight to junior welterweight and chose to relinquish the uppermost in favor of defending his WBC lightweight belt last July. To achieve what he seeks – which is legend status – he must not only defeat arguably the best welterweight in the world on March 16 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. He must pack on 12 pounds or so of muscle to do it.

Garcia is making the kind of jump greats like Henry Armstrong made, moving up a full weight class without the benefit of facing even one lesser 147-pound challenge before squaring off with The Ring's No. 1-rated welterweight.

For Spence, the challenge is different, although no less daunting. While Garcia may not yet be a legitimate welterweight, he is a proven elite-level boxer, and like Spence, ranked among the top 10 pound-for-pound in the world. That may not make either a legend, but it establishes that both are dangerous. Extremely so, which only makes Garcia's choice to step in with Spence more significant.

Neither needed to choose this route. Spence had numerous options, both for unification fights and less dangerous contenders while he marked time for the Big Fight he craves. Garcia faced the same situation, not only in the lightweight and junior welterweight divisions but now at welterweight, where he could have easily justified fighting a less formidable opponent first.

In fact, Garcia's father and brother, who have trained him since he was a teenager and throughout most of his professional career, cautioned him to do just that. Both tried to dissuade him when he first raised the idea of facing Spence, but like the 39 fighters and one promoter who have challenged Garcia during his career, they lost.

"My father and I were against it at first," admits Robert Garcia, a former IBF titleholder himself who will now prepare his younger brother for the biggest fight of his career. "We told Mikey there were so many other fights he could take and still make a lot of money.

"We thought he should take his time, and when the time was right, move to 147. We didn't think it was impossible, but why not wait? But Mikey is different than everyone else. He wouldn't feel right facing opponents who don't mean that much. We all know Spence is a difficult fight. He's very fast. He has great power. He works to the body very well. Obviously Mikey will feel that power at welterweight with eight-ounce gloves. But Mikey talked to both of us, and then my Dad told me, 'It's done. Now we train him to win.'

"We have a fighter who is very smart in the ring. On the outside he looks very basic, but when you get in with him you realize how difficult he is. I've worked with 12 world champions, but Mikey's the special one."

He will have to be to beat Spence, who is not only naturally bigger but will have the advantage of fighting in his hometown, where his love of boxing began unexpectedly at the age of 15 after his father took what was then a budding football star for a summer drive. Where they ended up was hotter than the stifling Texas air outside.

"The last place I thought we'd be going was to a boxing gym," Spence recalled. "It was a real old-school gym. No A/C. Whatever it was outside is what it was inside. The first couple days I was a little bit confused.

"The second week, I sparred a guy three weight classes above me. I was 120-something. He dropped me with a body shot. That was eye-opening! But I came back the next day. I liked it but I didn't really care for it. At first, I did want to quit, but my father told me if I quit at this I'd quit at anything. He made me stick it out.

"I knew I was good two years into it. I started doing research on fighters. I knew about the Olympics but not boxing in the Olympics. I found out about Sugar Ray Leonard, Ali, Foreman and Roy Jones. I had high hopes for it."

Those hopes were crushed in the quarterfinals of the 2012 Olympics in London in the way many American amateurs have lost in recent Olympics – by the kind of hotly disputed decision that Spence says "robs you on the greatest stage in the world. I was heartbroken. It was hard, man."

He turned pro several months later and within five years was facing IBF welterweight titleholder Kell Brook in Sheffield, England – Brook's hometown. Home cooking did Brook little good, however, as Spence survived a sluggish start after having had "chocolate brownies thrown at me" during his ring walk (a reference to a pre-fight taunt made by Brook) and overwhelmed the champion. He threw no brownies. Rather, he threw lightning-quick jabs and crisp hooks that forced Brook to take a knee in both the 10th and 11th rounds before the fight was mercifully stopped with the orbital bone in Brook's left eye shattered along with his spirit.

"I didn't feel that sharp, but a true champion still wins," Spence said at the time. And he went on to do so twice more, stopping Lamont Peterson and Carlos Ocampo while consistently calling out Thurman without much of a response.

"I'm waiting for 'Sometime' Thurman," Spence said, poking fun at Thurman's "One Time" nickname after forcing Peterson, both eyes swollen shut and having already made

one trip to the floor, to retire on his stool after the seventh round. "I've been waiting a long time."

That wait continues. But in the interim, Garcia called him out and Spence responded affirmatively, noting for the record his admiration for the step Garcia is taking. It is a step many of Spence's full-blown welterweight rivals have been less than enthusiastic about.

"I think he did it because he wants to be the best," Spence said of Garcia. "This is a history fight for him. I give him all the respect in the world. He's daring to be great. You don't get that a lot in this day and age.

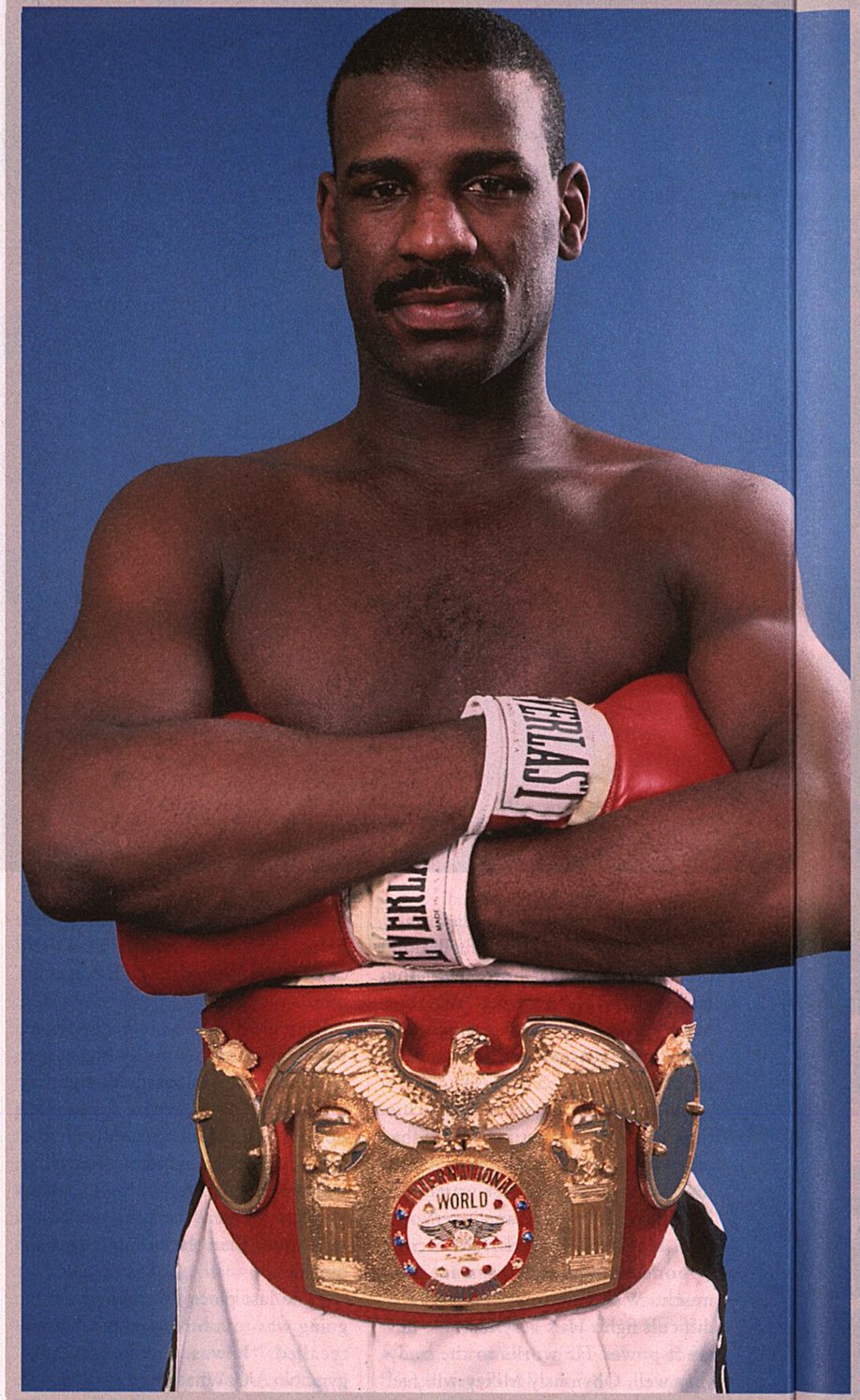
"He's very smart. He's a good, technical fighter with a lot of skills. He's the first guy to call me out. He's the biggest name I can get right now. I know he's serious about it. He comes to win and so do I.

"He wants to move up and dethrone me. He knows this is a legacy fight for him, but it's a win/win for him. If he loses, they'll say I was too big for him. If he can dethrone me, he'll be pound-for-pound number one. I respect what he's trying to do, but that's not going to happen. I'm the stronger fighter. I'm the better fighter."

While Garcia shares the same respect for Spence and a similar late start in the sport, he has spent his life around boxing and understands the significance of this moment. He has pursued it for nearly 20 years after unexpectedly finding himself inside a boxing ring at the age of 13, untrained but right at home.

"A kid didn't have an opponent and they asked me to fight," recalled Garcia, who is the youngest of seven siblings, born into a fighting family but without a bit of interest in it when this all began. "I'd never trained, but I knew a little bit. I wasn't even a licensed amateur. It just came natural to me. I became aware that day I could do it very easily. It was fun.

"I never thought I'd be a boxer. I never wanted to. For me, that was my brothers fighting. That was my father's business. That was (Fernando)



CHRISTIAN PETERSEN

YOGA, HYPNOSIS, AND MAGGOT JUICE: TRAINING GURUS THROUGH THE AGES

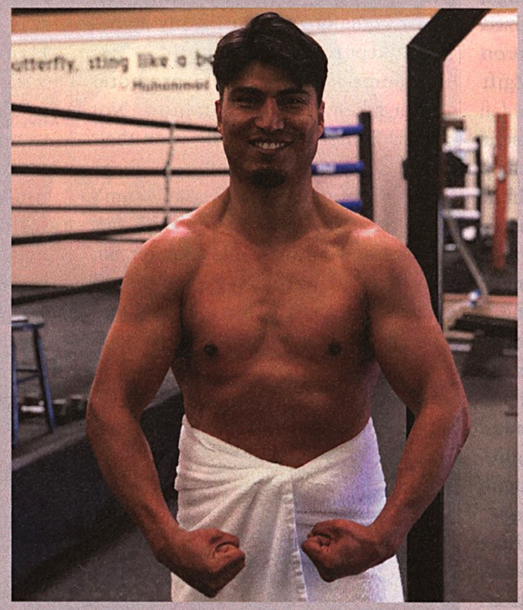
By **Don Stradley**

A big topic concerning the Garcia-Spence bout has been Garcia's involvement with controversial conditioning consultant Victor Conte. Of course, Conte's dodgy reputation as the founder of BALCO precedes him. But long before Conte was advocating for better drug testing in boxing or working with world-class boxers at his Bay Area SNAC gym, and even before his scandalous years of doping athletes, fighters have sought help from outside traditional boxing circles. Some, like Garcia, were attempting to add size to take on larger opponents. Others were trying to lose weight, or simply hoping to develop their mental game. Not surprisingly, the self-styled gurus engaged to work with fighters have been easy targets for cynics and skeptics.

Heavyweight contender Lou Nova made news in 1939 when he began working with Dr. Pierre Bernard, operator of a renowned upstate New York health farm. Nova's plan was to embellish his boxing regimen with the ancient art of yoga. Known as "Oom the Omnipotent," Bernard vowed to improve Nova's breathing and get him aligned with the universe. The fighter and the yogi made for some good press, especially when Nova started talking about his "cosmic punch," a blow thrown in time with the earth's rotation. Bernard's teachings couldn't help his famous student avoid serious beatings from the likes of Joe Louis and Tony Galento, but Nova remained a lifelong yoga advocate.

From 1970 to 1973, Ken Norton hired hypnotist Michael Dean to help him with his confidence. When Norton made history with his upset win over Muhammad Ali, Dean upset his newly famous client by taking too much credit. Disgusted by Dean's hubris, Norton fired him. In the ensuing years, Norton occasionally employed Arthur Ellen, a popular nightclub hypnotist who fortified Norton with various "positive thinking" techniques. Norton went on to have a Hall of Fame career, though his positive thoughts were knocked clear out of his head by the likes of George Foreman, Earnie Shavers and Gerry Cooney.

When light heavyweight champion Michael Spinks challenged heavyweight king Larry Holmes in 1985, he enlisted the help of a little-known fitness coach named Mackie Shilstone. With Shilstone's assistance, Spinks added weight – he came into the ring at 200 pounds – but kept most of his mobility. To the shock of many, Spinks won a close decision and the Ring/IBF heavyweight championship. Shilstone became the talk of the sports world.



Will working with a conditioning guru pay off for a bulkier Garcia as it did for Michael Spinks (opposite page)?

Though Shilstone's clients would later include such names as Serena Williams, Ozzie Smith and actor John Goodman, he kept a hand in boxing. In 2003, he helped reigning light heavyweight champ Roy Jones Jr. gain weight for his bout with heavyweight titleholder John Ruiz, and in 2006 he assisted Bernard Hopkins in preparing to challenge The Ring light heavyweight champ Antonio Tarver in the former middleweight champion's first bout over 160 pounds. That Jones and Hopkins were both victorious added to Shilstone's legacy.

Riddick Bowe hired Shilstone more than once, but Shilstone was often frustrated by Bowe's laziness. Though booked to help Bowe trim down for his first bout with Evander Holyfield, Shilstone's contributions were overshadowed by another addition to Bowe's camp: comedian Dick Gregory.

A well-known political commentator in the 1960s, Gregory was also a health food expert, having invented a series of drinks and powders designed to help people lose weight. He'd even served as Ali's nutritionist for a short time. His real concern was for the life expectancy of African Americans, which he believed could be improved with his special "Slim-Safe Bahamian Diet." Where Bowe was concerned, Gregory claimed responsibility for purifying Bowe's blood, one cell at a time. Along with 300 vitamin pills per day, Gregory introduced Bowe to a special potion, which Bowe dubbed "maggot juice." The foul stuff, which consisted of anything Gregory could fit into a blender, seemed to work (the ingredients were generally plant-based, however; no actual fly larvae were involved). On November 12, 1992, a lean-and-ready Bowe defeated Holyfield by 12-round decision and became undisputed heavyweight champion.

Speaking of Holyfield, "The Real Deal" defied old-school conventions when he decided to move from cruiserweight to heavyweight. First, he hired bodybuilding champion Lee Haney to help him add bulk. Veteran boxing trainers winced at the idea of a boxer throwing iron weights around, but Holyfield's experimental approach paid off. To avoid becoming muscle-bound, Holyfield's team incorporated a ballet instructor to help him stay flexible, plus conditioning expert Tim Hallmark, who improved Holyfield's stamina. When the pumped-up version of Holyfield KO'd Buster Douglas for the heavyweight title in 1990, he kicked off a new era in boxing.

Inspired by Spinks and Holyfield, a fresh generation of boxers grew obsessed with bulking up and out of their weight classes in search of paydays. The downside, unfortunately, was that the influx of strength coaches and novel training methods left the door wide open for boxing's new scourge: PED use. For better and worse, boxing had entered the modern age. RING

Vargas at La Colonia (the Oxnard, California, gym where Eduardo Garcia developed Vargas and Robert into world champions and hundreds of other kids into more disciplined young men). I would just go watch. I never played other sports either. I was into video games."

Regardless of his preferences, Mikey Garcia was a child prodigy, a master of a dark art who realized almost immediately he'd been touched. Like Spence, he has a gift and decided to use it.

"It was boring at times because it was so easy," Garcia said of his early days in boxing. "I was like a kid playing video games. Once you reach the hardest level and you beat that game a few times, you stop playing it and look for something challenging."

His official amateur career began at 14, and by 19 he'd turned pro, running up a 30-0 record with 26 KOs before facing veteran Orlando Salido for the WBO featherweight title on January 19, 2013. Although Salido had nearly twice as many professional fights, the prodigy overwhelmed him. Garcia knocked him down four times, including twice in the first round, before winning a technical decision after Salido's head broke Garcia's nose in the eighth round and the doctor stopped the bout. They didn't have to read the cards to know who won.

Garcia has gone on to win the WBO junior lightweight, the WBC lightweight and the IBF junior welterweight titles while improving his record to 39-0. Actually it should be 40-0, because he also forced a settlement with promoter Bob Arum after a contract dispute, though it drove Garcia into a 2½-year layoff in the prime of his career.

That fight, like the one he's made with Spence, was opposed by his family and friends. Looking back, Garcia admits had he known he would be out of the ring so long, he might have tried another road. But, as with his decision to jump from 135 to 147, he has no regrets.

"I bet on myself," Garcia said. "There were times it was difficult and scary. There was no finish line in sight, but I kept believing it would happen, and it's paying off with interest now. If anyone thought that was going to hurt me, they were wrong. My fan base actually grew during my layoff. That kept reassuring me.

"Some fighters need a promoter even after they're champion. Not every fighter is able to do it on their own. To develop a fighter, you need a good promoter. Top Rank (Arum's company) did a great job with me. They know how to build a fighter, but I was at a stage I felt I should have been bigger than I was. Now I'm a free agent. I control my career. I don't have any short-term deals or long-term deals (with promoters or cable networks). I'm willing to work with any promoter.

"Now I can get the fights I want. I can do what's best for my career – not someone else's agenda. I bet on myself because I believe in myself so much."

That belief has led Mikey Garcia to this moment. To stepping up the way old-school guys like Homicide Hank once did, although no one will ever again hold world titles in three separate weight classes simultaneously, as Armstrong managed to do in 1938 when he added the lightweight and welterweight championships to the featherweight title he won the previous year.

It is feats like that which define greatness in boxing, and Garcia and

Grizzled former titleholder Lamont Peterson was no match for Spence.

Garcia proved he is more than capable of fighting above lightweight with a one-sided decision over Adrien Broner in July 2017.

ANTHONY GEATHERS

Spence both know it. While these are different times, Garcia's decision to give up four inches in reach, nearly as much in height and most certainly an edge in punching power is his version of seeking what only the greatest fighters achieve.

Many have titles. Only the few leave a legacy behind them, and that comes only if you're willing to risk it all for glory.

"At this point in my career, I'm looking for greatness," Garcia said. "If it means you move up a weight division, more power to me. If it means you go to someone's hometown, more power to me. It's the same fighter in front of me whether we fight in Dallas or New York or Vegas. In the end, it's another four ropes and four corners.

"Spence is very good. He reminds me a little of myself. He's not the flashiest guy, but he does have good power. I think that's a reflection of his opponents a little bit, but you have to have power to hurt a guy. It's apparent he has that.

"So why fight him? I do need this fight. I need a marquee name and I just feel I'm a better fighter. I'm only getting better, faster. I adjust very well. I've never had a problem with southpaws. If I have to fight him on the outside and make him reach, I will. If I have to stay on the inside to take away his reach and work his body, that's what I'm prepared to do.

"No one else is willing to do what I'm doing. After this fight, everybody will really recognize me as the top fighter. My dad and brother wanted me to take someone else, but anyone else coming off a loss or a has-been doesn't do it for me. I see the reasoning behind what they were saying. I'm a small guy to begin with who never fought at 147. It's logical to fight someone who isn't as threatening first to get a feel for it. I considered it, but I'm always looking for the biggest challenges. No one else motivated me other than Errol Spence. I want to beat great champions.

"Most people don't see what the fighter sees inside the ring. They don't have the eye for it. Even most fighters don't. They look at me and don't see anything special. They're right. I don't have any special skills that set me apart. You don't see anything too out there. I'm pretty basic.

"It's the subtle little moves that make the difference inside the ring. I'm always one step ahead. Opponents don't see that on video. When they get in the ring, they realize it's a whole different experience. I don't have any doubts. I know I'll win."

Spence feels the same way. But only one can win, and the boxing world isn't quite sure who it will be. Many think Spence's size will prove too much to overcome, but others point out that when challenged, Garcia has never been found wanting.

Robert Garcia knows the pitfalls and dangers that come with facing Errol Spence. The trainer does not hide from the difficulties they will face on March 16. But he also knows his brother.

"You cannot take anything away from Errol Spence," Robert Garcia said. "He is a complete fighter. He's very talented. But I guarantee you two things: Errol won't be stronger than Mikey and he's never been in with a guy like Mikey. Spence has to know he's in for a fight. And so are we."

Whoever has his hand raised that night will have taken a step toward the greatness both are seeking, a greatness that comes not from the pursuit of title belts but from accepting great challenges. Errol Spence and Mikey Garcia have agreed to do that. What happens next is up to them. RING

THE ART OF WARRINGTON

UNDERRATED THROUGHOUT A 10-YEAR PROFESSIONAL CAREER, **JOSH WARRINGTON** FINALLY BROKE FREE OF THE PACK WITH A PAIR OF DEFINING VICTORIES IN 2018

By **Tom Gray**

Two high-quality triumphs over Lee Selby and Carl Frampton (inset) have seen Warrington break into the featherweight elite.

Who the hell is this guy?

That was the question that Carl Frampton appeared to ask himself halfway through Round 1. His opponent, labeled as a relatively light hitter, had attacked with an explosive volley of power punches and hurt him. Frampton, a classy two-weight world titleholder, backed off with a look of shock on his reddening face. That same expression then immediately transferred to ringsiders and a TV audience on both sides of the Atlantic.

The unbeaten Josh Warrington, who sensationally outpointed Lee Selby in May to lift the IBF featherweight title, was providing a dazzling encore at the Manchester Arena on December 22. Following a terrific battle, he would prevail via 12-round unanimous decision, and his status as an elite player at 126 pounds was rubber-stamped.

The Frampton triumph was the final act of an extraordinary 2018 for the affable 28-year-old from Leeds, England. Warrington (28-0, 6 knockouts) had won a world title against the odds, and he had now defended it against the odds. Scores of so-called experts were flabbergasted by his rapid ascent, but Warrington had always known what he was capable of, and that flair for the dramatic has long

Despite his low knockout percentage, Warrington's punching power clearly had an effect on the durable Frampton.

CHRISTIAN PETERSEN

been evident.

"I would ask people why they didn't think I could compete at the top level," recalled Warrington, who is now rated No. 2 by The Ring at featherweight. "I was unbeaten. I'd passed every test, some with flying colors, some by just getting the win. I guess people looked at past performances and thought, 'Fuckin' hell, he's giving it his all; there can't be much more left in him!' That's not their fault, because it was only me and my team who really knew what I could do. The last couple of wins, we knew we had that in the locker and it was just about bringing it to the table.

"Even after the Frampton fight, some of my closest friends were saying, 'Fuckin' hell, Josh, why were you standing there trading with him?' I said, 'Lads, I do that week in, week out in sparring sessions.' I have sparring sessions that are worse than that, and I can go at that pace for 12 rounds if I have to. If I need to stand and trade, then I can do it, but I also proved that I can box against Selby."

Warrington's versatility has unquestionably been overlooked. Despite having claimed English, British, Commonwealth and European championships, the Leeds star was predominantly pigeonholed as a busy slugger who won fights through attrition. That theory was obliterated with the Selby and Frampton victories. Yes, Warrington is a cerebral pressure fighter, but he also possesses world-class boxing skills.

So surely a fighter of this quality has been brought along by an experienced and decorated coach with years of experience at the top level? Maybe an ex-champion whose knowledge inside the ropes was easily passed on to young prospects who followed in his footsteps?

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sean O'Hagan, Warrington's father and trainer, didn't box amateur or pro, although punch swapping was certainly not alien to him.

"I was a doorman in Leeds," said O'Hagan, who became a bouncer at the age of 19. "It was a hard job, extremely violent, but in those days nobody was using bats or knives or anything; it was just straight fists. I learned how to look after myself because my job called for it. Also, white-collar boxing is a big thing now and everyone's raving about it, but back in the '80s it was called unlicensed boxing. I had a few goes at that, so I knew what it was like to climb in a ring, and I knew what it was like to get chinned. Anyway, I'm not the hardest man, but I learned how to avoid being hit.

"Later, Josh came along and he was a lively little character. I was still going down the gym and banging bags, and he showed an interest for it. We joined the local amateur club and he had two or three fights as a beginner at 11 years of age. In his first fight, he weighed 28 kilograms (61 pounds)."

O'Hagan is an amazing character who has worked for everything he has. As a single father, he brought up three sons and devoted himself to providing as comfortable a life for them as possible. Unable to work at peak times as a cab driver because he was getting his kids ready for school or putting them to bed, it was not unusual for O'Hagan to do double shifts. He would work from Saturday morning until Monday morning with literally no sleep to make up ground financially. Struggling to make ends meet, O'Hagan even remortgaged his house more than once so that he could clear debts and allow his son to continue in the fight game. If his father hadn't taken such drastic measures, Warrington would not be champion today.

"Now that's a true story," said O'Hagan. "When you've done that – when you've thought, 'Fuckin' hell, if he gets beat here, I'm in shit,' when you can never look forward to the day you're gonna retire – when you've been through that, you're not gonna allow yourself to get beat. You're gonna do your homework, aren't you?

"All these people who say so-and-so is gonna beat Josh Warrington, they don't really know what they're talking about. They haven't looked at the journey we've had. They don't know what we're made of. I might not be the toughest man on the block, and I'm not a violent man in any way – I'm actually very placid – but we've had to be made of fuckin' steel, me and my boys."

Warrington has inherited his father's warmth, inner strength and many of his values. In late 2017, he married his long-term partner, Natasha, who has since given birth to twin daughters. However, juxtaposed alongside his congeniality as a family man is a serious mean streak and undeniable toughness.

"As a fighter you can be super-strong, super-fast and have the best of engines, but you still need to have that bit of something inside you; you still need to have it upstairs, and you need to be able to deal with crisis situations," Warrington said.

"The Dennis Tubieron fight (UD 12, April 2015) was a turning point for me because I got criticized for that performance. From then on, I was labeled as a hype job, or a ticket-seller who can't punch. That would break a lot of people down, but the way I've been raised means tough times are just the norm. People might think they got to me, but I don't give a toss."

When it comes to critics, Warrington is understandably dismissive. His main focus is on the people who have helped him reach this point, and the hard work his father has put in is certainly not lost on him.

"Time is the most precious gift ever," said Warrington with more than a touch of emotion in his voice. "You can't buy it, and once it's gone, it's gone forever. Fuck big fancy houses. Time is the biggest gift you have, and I can never repay him for that. The sacrifices my dad has made, and my brothers who missed out when my dad spent extra time with me in the gym, will always be on my mind.

"As I go forward in my career, anything that I can do which can help in terms of money will never be a problem. I got season tickets for Leeds United recently and I made sure they got theirs, and if I can get a piece of memorabilia signed, then I'll do that too."

Elland Road stadium is home to the Leeds United soccer team, and it's hallowed ground to Warrington, who is a massive fan. It is also the venue where he dethroned Selby. That night, more than 20,000 fight fans showed up to watch their man fulfill a childhood dream, and Warrington, along with family and friends, was responsible for offloading 4,000 tickets. Given that there are many high-profile shows that don't generate that much overall at the box office, it is an absolutely remarkable number.

"I remember my manager telling me that if I wanted to be a top prospect, then I had to sell tickets to pay for my opponents," recalled Warrington. "I was an apprentice dental technician and I didn't really have a pot to piss in. I worked hard, but after training and getting fuel in the car, I never had any money. So getting an extra 20 quid for selling tickets was a fuckin' bonus.

"I always enjoyed the personal touch, and I understood that people were paying their hard-earned money to come and support me. I still do it now. I did it for the Frampton fight. Some boxers might say, 'Oh, I'm a champion, I don't need to do this.' But fuck that! In the early days, I'd make the effort to drive across the city to deliver five tickets to one lad, because word spreads, and the next time it's 10 tickets, then 15 and so on. Before I knew it, that had snowballed. By the time I reached title level, Leeds United had taken an interest and I'd get invited on to the pitch and stuff. It just took off. But none of that was handed to me."

THE ART OF WARRINGTON

In modern boxing, there are a select few who are lucky enough to be groomed for stardom. The likes of Vasiliy Lomachenko and Anthony Joshua traded in Olympic gold medals for lucrative professional contracts, and they annexed world titles early. Today, one is the pound-for-pound king, one is the number one heavyweight on the planet and both have careers to be celebrated.

Warrington's journey has been completely different, but his accomplishments are no less remarkable. Perpetually written off, granted no favors by boxing's power structure, this working-class hero served an almost 10-year apprenticeship to ready himself for world title level. When he was finally given an opportunity, Warrington rose to the occasion and took what he'd earned.

"Yeah, and we're not finished by a long, long way," said O'Hagan. "I mean, people are starting to believe now, and they're asking, 'What's next, Sean?' I'm like, 'You know what? I think we can unify!' We're still getting the same stuff, 'Oh, you won't beat ...' and then they'll mention a name.

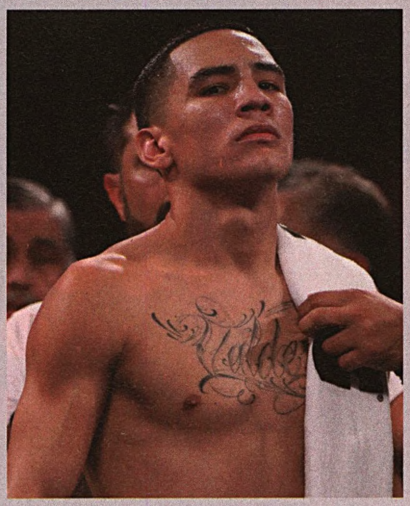
"Listen, Josh was only firing at about 70 percent against Frampton. When I say we're going to unify, I mean we're going to unify. Before Frampton, Josh and his wife had just settled with the twins and they were moving into a new house. We were doing a film, the weather was atrocious, so we couldn't use the track, and there were the little viruses that you pick up during camp. All of that, and I still knew we'd win."

Both Warrington and O'Hagan revealed that they're happy to meet any of the rival titleholders at 126 pounds (see sidebar). Oscar Valdez (WBO), who has recovered from a broken jaw sustained in his March bout with Scott Quigg, was scheduled to face unheralded Italian Carmine Tommasone on February 2 when this

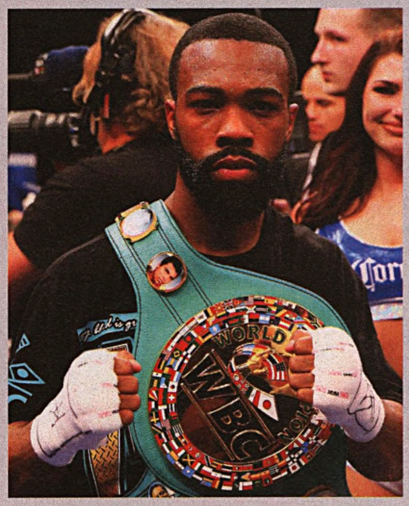
Warrington's physical conditioning has opponents struggling to match his pace and intensity.

WARRINGTON WISH LIST

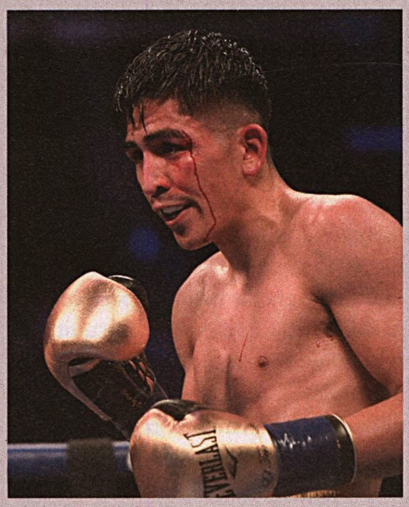
In order of preference, here is who the Leeds warrior would like to tangle with next.



1. Oscar Valdez (24-0, 19 knockouts) –
"He's tough and he's a proper Mexican warrior. His boxing ability is underrated by anyone who only views him as a slugger. Don't get me wrong, he loves a scuffle, but he sets up his attacks well and once he gets going with those combinations, he puts everything into every punch."



3. Gary Russell Jr. (29-1, 17 KOs) –
"His speed is a major strength – I'm sure that's what most people would say. He's very impressive, and if you give him a chance to get off, he puts his punches together really quick. He's quite slick with his counters, too. He's very inactive, though, and that doesn't do him any favors."



2. Leo Santa Cruz (35-1-1, 19 KOs) –
"I was surprised with his tactics against Frampton in the rematch. He was known as a warrior like Valdez, but against Carl he boxed off the back foot and used his height. His boxing brain is fantastic, and even though he's not the biggest puncher, he makes up for that with accumulation."

4. Kid Galahad (26-0, 15 KOs) –
"Do I have to fuckin' answer this one? I could be in with him next. (sighs) Look, he's got a slick style, typical Ingle fighter, and he can switch-hit. He's got good variety and throws the shots from different angles. I can't say any more because he's never mixed at the top level. The (performance-enhancing) drug scandal will always leave a sour taste in my mouth."

[Editor's note: Kid Galahad tested positive for the banned substance stanozolol in 2014.]

issue went to press. Leo Santa Cruz (WBA) is the No. 1 featherweight in the world and is scheduled to face Miguel Flores on February 16. Gary Russell Jr. (WBC) is super-talented, but he has nothing lined up at present and has been fighting on a once-a-year schedule since 2015.

Showdowns with any one of these opponents could produce serious fireworks, but as things stand, the next time you see Warrington in a prize ring, he'll likely be standing across from countryman Kid Galahad. The Sheffield-based switch-hitter is a former British, Commonwealth and European champion at 122 pounds who also happens to be the IBF's No. 1 challenger. At the time of publication, that organization had set a date of January 24 for purse bids to be submitted from Frank Warren, who represents Warrington, and Matchroom Boxing, which represents Galahad.

Warrington's brain trust is keen for a unification fight, but the tone from all concerned suggests that they will have no choice but to fulfill their mandatory obligation.

"At the moment, the IBF are insisting that Galahad is next, but we would like a unification fight," said longtime manager Steve Wood. "I think we'll look to appeal, because we don't want to remain at this level or, to be honest, digress below the level of Josh's last two opponents.

"I'd like Josh to unify the division, remain undefeated, make a lot of money and get out. That would be the icing on the cake for me. I think Josh is getting the recognition now, and it's been a long time coming. He certainly won't be the long-priced underdog in his next fight, whether it's Valdez, Russell, Santa Cruz or Galahad."

Nothing is guaranteed in boxing. But if Warrington overcomes Galahad and secures a unification bout, just resist the temptation to write him off completely. After all, how many times have you written him off before? RING

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

CANELO ALVAREZ VS. DANIEL JACOBS IS ON (DAZN)!

THE STREAMING SERVICE DELIVERS ITS FIRST MEGAFIGHT WITH THE MAY 4 MIDDLEWEIGHT SHOWDOWN. COULD IT BE THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF PAY-PER-VIEW?

By **Doug Fischer**

Have you heard the good news?

Pay-per-view is dead!

Oscar De La Hoya said so repeatedly on his Twitter account, so it must be true, right?

Of course not.

The pay-per-view model is still very much a part of the boxing business in the U.K. and in the U.S., where four major PPV cards – Deontay Wilder-Tyson Fury, Manny Pacquiao-Adrien Broner, Errol Spence-Mikey Garcia and Terence Crawford-Amir Khan – will have taken place between December 1 and April 20.

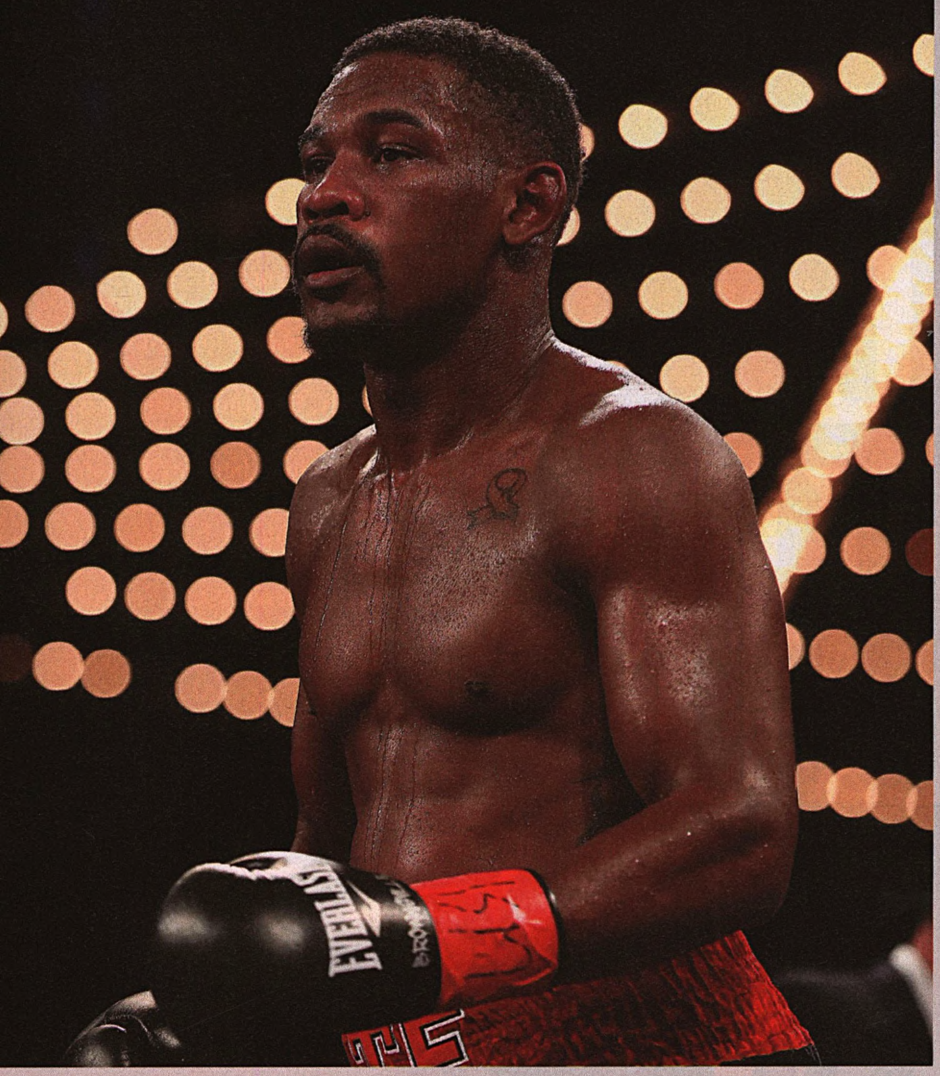
But we can't be mad at De La Hoya's wishful thinking. Once upon a time, those main events would have been on HBO or Showtime, included with the other entertainment programming that came with the monthly subscription price of the premium cable networks. Now, diehard U.S. boxing fans will have to shell out at least $300 to watch all four fights.

With the demise of HBO's boxing program, De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions – and the shining star of his stable, Canelo Alvarez – have partnered with DAZN, the global streaming platform that has boldly vowed to "fix" America's "broken PPV system."

The mantra of the $9.99-per-month subscription service, which launched in the U.S. last September and made waves in the boxing world by signing Alvarez to a record-breaking multi-year deal in October, is a question of value for the combat sports fan: Would you rather pay close to $100 to watch one pay-per-view fight or $100 a year to watch between 70-80 fight cards (boxing and MMA)?

Most would gleefully go with the second choice, but only if some legit pay-per-view-level matchups are included in the package, which brings us to Alvarez vs. Daniel Jacobs. The middleweight showdown between the Mexican star and American standout, which was announced in January, takes place on May 4. The venue had yet to be determined by press time (although Golden Boy Promotions has a hold on T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas), but the only place to watch the broadcast of the fight in the U.S. is on DAZN.

The nascent platform can't just deal in quantity to gain a foothold in the U.S. sports combat market; it's got to deliver quality. And not just quality fighters – DAZN has that with Alvarez and with U.K. star Anthony Joshua, who came with the platform's partnership with Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing. It must present



quality fights.

Make that pay-per-view-quality fights, because Joshua's first bout streamed on DAZN – a rousing seventh-round stoppage of Alexander Povetkin at Wembley Stadium last September – was a quality heavyweight scrap. However, it didn't move the needle in the U.S. Neither did Alvarez's DAZN debut on December 15, a third-round stoppage of Rocky Fielding at Madison Square Garden.

Not to dismiss Alvarez's first fight in New York City; more than 20,000 fans packed The World's Most Famous Arena to witness his body-punching clinic put the brave British super middleweight down four times in agonizing pain. That's Canelo Power for you. But to get Canelo Power to create PPV Power – or given the new paradigm: one million-plus DAZN subscriptions – Alvarez (51-1-2, 35 knockouts) needs a very well-known and respected dance partner.

And the 28-year-old Guadalajara native's got that with Jacobs (35-2, 29 KOs). The 32-year-old boxer-puncher from Brooklyn, New York, has the experience, athleticism and skill to upset Alvarez. The only middleweight the boxing public deems worthier than Jacobs of challenging the Ring/WBA/WBC champ is Gennady Golovkin. But GGG was still a free agent at the start of 2019, and the Kazakhstani hero was still deciding which network/platform to align with at press time.

Neither Canelo Alvarez nor Daniel Jacobs will be in for an easy night on May 4, and the result could be a win for fans.

Jacobs, who was the first to extend Golovkin the 12-round distance in a close decision loss to the former champ in March 2017, also began the year as a free agent, but he chose to extend his contract with Matchroom Boxing USA and sign a three-fight deal with DAZN in order to get a shot at Alvarez.

"He's one of the top guys," Golden Boy president Eric Gomez said of Jacobs during an interview on the SiriusXM radio show At the Fights. "If you really look at the (middleweight) rankings and the top guys in the division, he's one of them. A lot of fans, a lot of guys in the press, thought he beat Golovkin. So, (he and Canelo are) kind of like the last two standing."

Jacobs, an accomplished amateur who owns pro victories over Caleb Truax, Sergio Mora, Peter Quillin and Sergiy Derevyanchenko, whom he outpointed for the vacant IBF title last October, had this to say about the biggest fight of his career (per the Matchroom/Golden Boy/DAZN press releases):

"I have always believed I can beat Canelo, and on May 4 live on DAZN, I will get my chance to play it out. It's been nearly four years since Canelo has faced an American challenger. It's going to be a huge event where I believe I will cement myself as the best middleweight in the division."

It's a typical press release statement, but Jacobs is not wrong. If he beats Alvarez, he'll be the champ (no disrespect to WBO beltholder Demetrius Andrade), and anyone who believes the soon-to-be 37-year-old Golovkin has begun to fade will recognize Jacobs as the best middleweight. He's also correct about the May 4 bout being a huge event.

"On any other network or platform, Canelo vs. Jacobs would be an expensive pay-per-view," Joseph Markowski, DAZN EVP of North America, stated in the press release announcement of the fight. "At DAZN, we believe the best fights should be available to our subscribers at no extra charge."

And that belief brings us back to De La Hoya's social media declaration of the end of PPV. His wishful thinking will only become a self-fulfilling prophecy if Golden Boy, Matchroom Boxing, the two stars of those promotional entities and DAZN are committed to making the best fights.

May 4 is a bold indication that they are. RING

LORE OF THE RINGS

SIFTING FOR THE TRUTH IN SOME OF BOXING'S MOST ENDURING LEGENDS

By **Don Stradley**

As prizefighting emerged from its sordid beginnings to become a popular mainstream attraction in the 1880s and '90s, the public learned about fighters only through newspaper accounts. Consequently, like the gunfighters and bank robbers of the day, early boxing champions benefited from the creative embellishments of journalists trying to fill column inches. John L. Sullivan, for instance, though slightly less than 6 feet tall and often sporting a beer belly, was portrayed in print as a veritable Hercules of the Gilded Age.

This is why boxing history is full to the brim with myths and exaggeration. Readers enjoyed larger-than-life figures; newsmen obliged. And if a story seemed like it could've actually happened, the greater the chances it would survive for a few years. Or decades. As a character said in John Ford's classic western *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

For example, few boxing myths have had a longer shelf life than the one involving Harry Greb and Mickey Walker. This story, where two of boxing's most iconic figures got into a street fight, captured the imagination like few others. Who could blame people for wanting to believe? It was easy to imagine those two hard-nosed pugs knocking the hell out of each other outside a Prohibition-era speakeasy. It was a colorful incident that embodied the late-night swagger of New York in the Roaring '20s.

The tale went thusly: In July of 1925, after Greb won a 15-round decision over Walker at the Polo Grounds, the two ended up at the same Manhattan night spot, generally believed to be The Silver Slipper. After both were well-oiled, Walker said something along the lines of "I wish we'd had one more round. I would've finished you off." Greb, who had more than 250 bouts in his career and was probably just as comfortable fighting on pavement as on canvas, invited Walker outside for their 16th round. Once in the parking lot, Walker sucker punched Greb and knocked him cold.

The story stayed alive in various incarnations, thanks partly to Walker but also to various journalists who took it as gospel. Of course, the details grew fuzzier with every telling. Some versions had the brawl broken up by a cop or the Silver Slipper doorman; others had the men fighting over a woman. Perhaps in deference to Greb, who died in 1926

Rocky Marciano's 49-0 record has long been a fixation for boxing fans, so it's no surprise that conspiracy theories exist.

after a botched surgery, a new detail emerged, one that had him returning to the bar later in the evening and leaving with Walker's girlfriend.

Was any part of the story remotely true? The late Bert Randolph Sugar once told of a meeting with Walker when the fighter was elderly and living in a nursing home. When Sugar asked about the incident with Greb, Walker shrugged. "It never happened," he said. Walker waved it off like an old joke he'd heard too many times.

The scarcity of actual witnesses implies the story had always been bogus, and that Walker had kept it going just for fun. Still, the legend of Walker's parking lot battle with Greb will continue for as long as people crave two-fisted tales from boxing's distant past.

Of course, some myths persist because there is a kernel of truth in them, like the one about Rocky Marciano fighting his brother.

Though Marciano is a much-loved figure in boxing, he's had his share of detractors. For many years, Marciano's critics maintained his 49-0 record was a fraud. The reason, according to legend, was that one of his opponents was actually his brother. This strange story took on many forms, but the gist was always the same: Early in his career, to pad his record, Marciano fought his little brother, who gladly laid down to give The Rock one more KO victory.

The truth isn't so devious.

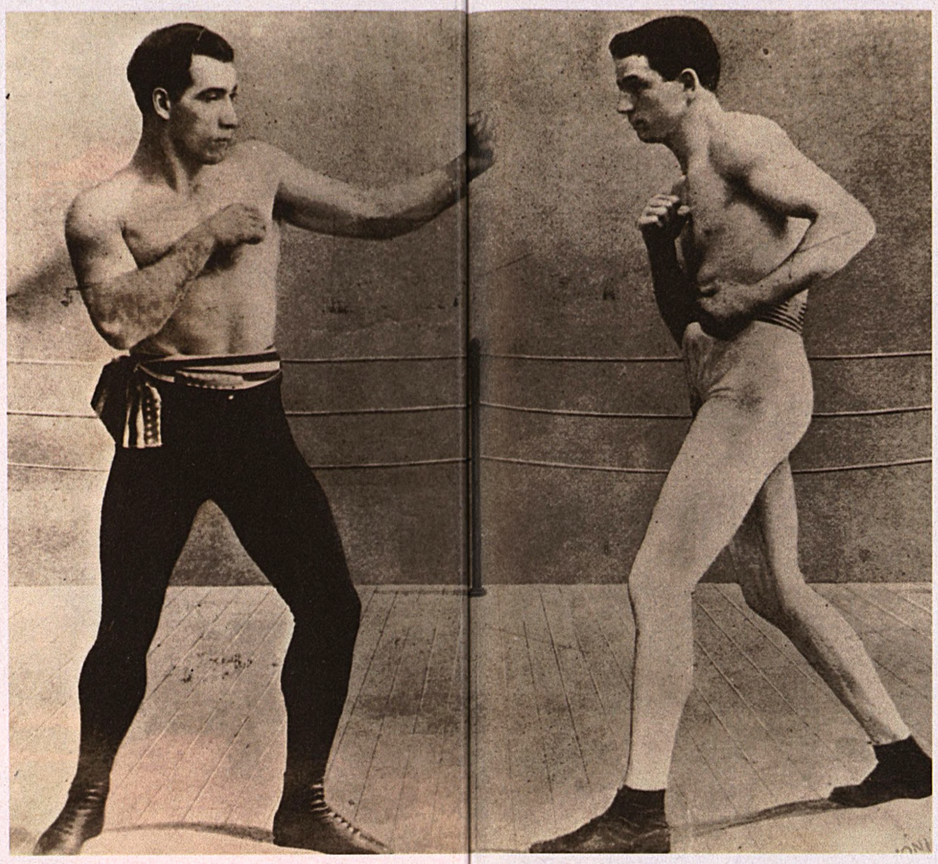
In 1952, Marciano fought four exhibitions throughout the state of Maine. Fighters once did this sort of thing all the time. It was a way to make some quick money, it was good exposure and it kept them busy. Unfortunately, Marciano's sparring partner was unable to make the trip to Maine. With the venues booked, it was decided that Marciano's brother, Sonny, would substitute and be introduced under an alias. The Mainers, however, were suspicious from the opening bell. For one thing, Sonny resembled Rocky. He also wasn't much of a boxer. The brothers thought it was all in good fun – sometimes Sonny was announced as Rocky, just to confuse people – but ticket buyers didn't like the joke. News outlets from Portland to Bar Harbor were flooded with angry calls; the customers insisted they had been victims of a scam.

Marciano was soon standing before the old grumps of the state athletic commission, being reprimanded like a little kid who had skipped a math class. He apologized, which should have ended the whole silly matter, but somehow this slightly comical moment from Marciano's past blew up into an absurd, longstanding myth. In the days before BoxRec, it wasn't easy to search out a fighter's actual record, so nevermind that none of his 49 official wins happened in Maine. You can be certain that somewhere in this great country of ours, just as you're reading this, some geezer in a gym or barbershop is declaring with great authority that Marciano's record is false because he fought his brother.

Myths, even when disproved, don't die easily. That's probably how Jack Dempsey felt when the issue of his loaded gloves came up, as it often did during the decades after he won the heavyweight championship from poor old Jess Willard.

Dempsey gave Willard an awful beating in 1919. The fight reports listed Willard's injuries: a shattered jawbone; a broken cheekbone; several lost teeth. Of course, reporters couldn't agree on the exact number and severity of Willard's wounds, but that didn't matter. For the rest of his life, Willard would allow people to touch a small dent in his cheek, allegedly put there by Dempsey.

Rumors that Dempsey had a little something extra in his gloves were whispered even in 1919, but in 1964 the story rocketed into the Space Age. It happened when Dempsey's manager, Jack Kearns, sold a confession to Sports Illustrated claiming that Dempsey had fought



Jack Sharkey (left) surely knew he was facing the actual Charles "Kid" McCoy after getting dropped twice in the second round of their 1899 bout. (He would eventually knock McCoy out in the 10th.)

Willard while his hands were covered in plaster of Paris. When SI made Kearns' revelation a cover story, the uproar was huge. Not surprisingly, Dempsey was outraged.

Kearns' anecdote, however, seemed unrealistic, especially when Dempsey supporters experimented to see if plaster could actually fit around a fighter's hands. The tests were revealing; the stuff turned to powder. Lucky for Dempsey, there also existed film and photographs of his ring entrance. He wasn't wearing gloves – it was customary at the time to have one's hands inspected in the ring, and to then be gloved up as someone from the opponent's side looked on. Dempsey clearly passed inspection from Willard's second. The old footage alone got Dempsey off the hook, but he went ahead and sued Sports Illustrated's publisher.

A settlement was reached out of court, but Kearns' story became fodder for boxing's conspiracy theorists. As with many myths, a segment of the public sort of hoped Dempsey's gloves *were* loaded. After all, those early days of boxing were like the Wild West; it was intriguing to think a fighter could cheat so outrageously. It made boxing appear all the more brutal.

To Dempsey's credit, he lived side by side for many years with the incredible plaster of Paris myth. The legend, ugly as it may have been, never really hurt him. In fact, it may have added to his mystique. And maybe, just maybe, Dempsey enjoyed it. His punches were so hard that people believed his fists were plastered; Willard, who helped promote the scandalous story, insisted that Dempsey's hands were covered by "chunks of cement." Dempsey's sheer blasting power was just that good.

Few fighters generated as many tall tales as Charles "Kid" McCoy, a major star of the 1890s. One of the myths around McCoy had to do with his inspiring the old American expression "the real McCoy," a term meaning the genuine article, or the real thing.

McCoy fought during the days when an unscrupulous promoter might hold an event on the outskirts of nowhere and claim "Kid McCoy" would be fighting. Since not many people actually knew what McCoy looked like, a promoter could produce anyone weighing 160 pounds and say it was Kid McCoy. (A quick look at the BoxRec database reveals 80 or so fighters using the name; there were probably more.) The story goes that McCoy cornered one of the imposters in a barroom and flattened him with a single right to the jaw. Then he held up his fist and said, "This is the real McCoy." Ring announcers caught on. When introducing the Kid they would always roar, "Don't be fooled by imitators, here is the real McCoy!" From there, allegedly, the phrase caught on.

McCoy buffs are understandably crestfallen when they learn the term appeared in books and newspapers many years before The Kid arrived.

One of the sport's most cherished legends involved Willie Pep and a 1946 bout where he was said to have done the impossible. That was the night he allegedly won a round without landing a punch.

The fight took place at the Minneapolis Auditorium against an opponent named Jackie Graves. The contest itself was a seesaw battle, with Pep stopping Graves in the eighth round. The legend goes that Pep made an off-air comment to radio commentator Don Riley, something about winning a round without putting a glove on his opponent. Riley dared him to try, and suggested he do it in the third.

More than 20 years passed before Riley mentioned the fight at a boxing banquet. Riley revealed that Pep had indeed spent the third round slipping and sliding, feinting and grabbing, dominating the action without landing so much as a glancing blow on Graves' head or body. Riley then claimed to have spied the scorecards, where Pep's name was penciled in next to Round 3. Why Riley hadn't mentioned Pep's stunt before was a mystery, but now the story was out and it spread with lightning speed. Pep even mentioned it in a 1970 interview with Peter Heller, saying he spent most of the three minutes bobbing and weaving, "making him look so bad they gave me the round."

When the esteemed New York Times writer Red Smith heard of the incident and described it in a 1975 column, Pep's feat gained more legitimacy. Even skeptics gave Pep the benefit of the doubt.

In 2003, however, a researcher named Jake Wegner turned up an old article from the St. Paul Pioneer Press. For boxing historians and Pep's admirers, Wegner's find was a bombshell. What he discovered was no less than an original fight report filed by a reporter named Joe Hennessy. From ringside, Hennessy described the third round as a frenzy of aggression from both fighters. "A clicker couldn't count the blows," Hennessy wrote.

So much for Pep's punchless round.

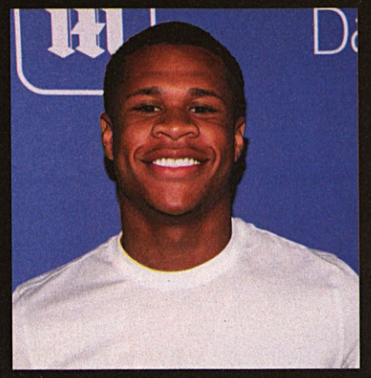
Riley and others discredited Hennessy, while some accepted Wegner's find as proof the story had been phony. Some even accused Riley and Pep of concocting it together.

Could Pep win a round without landing a punch? Could anyone? The myth's longevity is a credit to Pep's reputation. If anyone could pull off such a trick, it would've been "The Will o' the Wisp," Willie Pep.

Pep, rather poignantly, carried in his wallet a frayed and yellowed clipping of the Times article. He loved showing it to people. In a way, it became his identity. When he died in a Connecticut nursing home back in 2006, chances are he still had it with him.

Pep knew a very basic truth: Fighters die off. Legends live on.

DOING IT HIS WAY

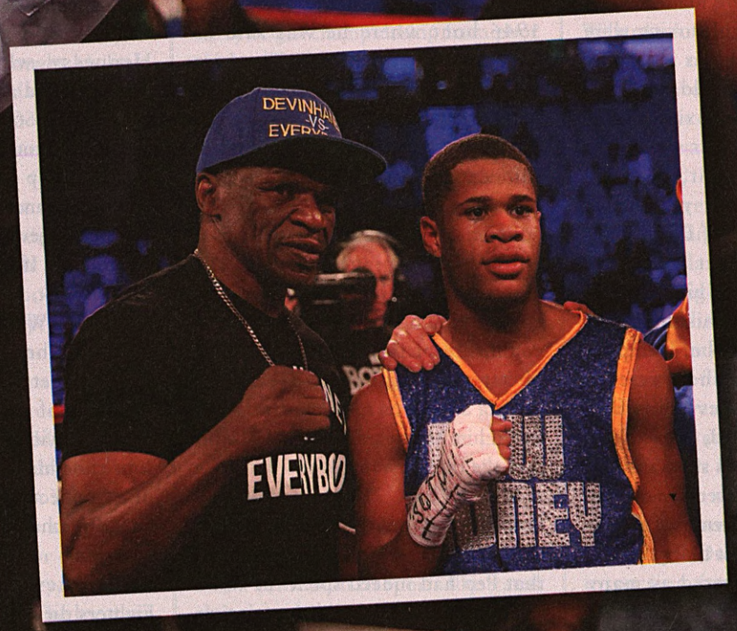


AT JUST 20 YEARS OLD, UNDEFEATED LIGHTWEIGHT PROSPECT DEVIN HANEY HAS PUT HIMSELF IN POSITION TO BE THE NEXT BIG THING IN BOXING

By **Michael Montero**

On Friday, September 28, 2018, undefeated lightweight prospect Devin Haney faced Mexican veteran Juan Carlos Burgos. The two squared off in the headliner of a *ShoBox: The New Generation* card at the Pechanga Resort & Casino in Temecula, California. Burgos, 11 years senior to Haney, never stopped trying but simply could not match the speed, skill and athleticism of his younger opponent. After 10 one-sided rounds, Haney had not only dominated the most experienced opponent of his budding young career, he had done so pulling double duty; in addition to fighting in the main event, he was the lead promoter of the card. The 20-year-old applied for his official promoter's license in California last summer and plans to apply in other states very soon. Although Devin Haney Promotions is a brand new company, the San Francisco native says he's been promoting himself since the amateur days.

"I always felt like I was my own promoter," Haney (21-0, 13 knockouts) told The Ring in late 2018. "Us fighters, we basically do our own promoting anyway. We're the ones doing the work and we don't get the credit for it. I wanted



Haney has been tight with the Mayweather clan (trainer Floyd Sr., in this case) since turning pro in 2015.

to set an example for younger kids coming up, that you don't have to sign one of these crazy contracts for a bunch of years. You can do your own promotion; you don't have to sign your life away."

It's not as if Haney hasn't been approached by just about everyone in the business. Floyd Mayweather Jr., whom he refers to as his adviser and mentor, expressed interest as soon as Haney turned pro. Top Rank added him to the Pacquiao-Bradley 3 card in Las Vegas in only his fifth pro bout. He also fought on cards promoted by Roy Jones Jr., J Russell Peltz and others. Golden Boy, Eddie Hearn, even Roc Nation – you name them, they've all come knocking at one point or another. But Haney had a game plan all along, not only in the ring but outside it as well.

In the information age, brands are developed online. While in the amateurs, a young Devin observed superstars like Mayweather promoting themselves on social media and followed suit. "I was built on the internet," he said, "posting videos of sparring sessions on YouTube and Instagram. I've only fought on American television two times; social media is how I built my name." Haney started a YouTube channel after turning pro in 2015 that has almost 2 million views. His Instagram profile currently has 250,000 followers. And unlike many athletes who falsely inflate their social media presence, Devin proudly notes that his followership is 100 percent organic. "People have told me that I should buy more followers, but I want to know exactly where I'm at," he said. "I don't want to have a false sense of how many people are really supporting me."

Haney practically grew up around boxing royalty. Former two-division titleholder Zab Judah is his godfather, he became acquainted with the Mayweathers when he was a young boy and has worked with renowned sports nutrition expert Victor Conte since before he turned pro. He recently trained with current middleweight titlists Daniel Jacobs and Demetrius Andrade at Conte's Scientific Nutrition for Advanced Conditioning (SNAC) gym in San Carlos, California. Since the age of 16, he's sparred with the likes of Shawn Porter, Jorge Linares and even briefly worked with Mayweather during the future hall of famer's camp for Conor McGregor.

Devin was born in San Francisco and grew up across the bay in Oakland. When he was 7, his father, William, claimed full custody and the two of them relocated to Las Vegas. Throughout his childhood, Devin would travel back and forth between California and Nevada, splitting time with his mother and father. Soon after moving to Vegas, William took his son to a boxing gym and Devin's life was changed forever.

"I was getting in a lot of fights at school and stuff, so one day my dad took me to the gym," Haney said. "On my first day, I sparred a kickboxer and I knocked him down. Derrick Harmon (a former pro fighter who once challenged Roy Jones for the light heavyweight championship) was training there; he told me I was a natural. Every day after that I just kept going back, with Derrick training me with my dad." Haney had his first amateur bout at 8 years old and would go on to tally a record of 130-8 in the unpaid ranks. On the way, he trained with Floyd Mayweather Sr., Virgil Hunter, Freddie Roach and others. William believed in his son's talent so much that he bought a gym in Vegas for him to train at. They named it The Hit Factory and held on to it for over four years. In 2012, William decided to sell off the gym to cover the growing expenses of his son's blossoming amateur career.

After winning gold at the 2014 U.S. Junior National Championships and 2015 USA Youth National Championships, Haney entered the U.S. Olympic training program to prepare for the 2016 Games in Rio. However, the International Boxing Association (AIBA) changed the minimum age requirement from 17 to 19, which meant he could not represent the United States at the 2016 Olympics. "Once they changed the age limit, I was bummed out," he said. "I had been fighting elite-level talent in the amateurs; I had over 20 international fights. I was ready." Haney was too young to compete in the Olympics but also too young to fight professionally in most American states. So he decided to go pro … in Mexico.

Haney fought nine times in 2016, including a four-round shutout of Rafael Vazquez on the undercard of Manny Pacquiao-Tim Bradley 3 in Las Vegas.

CHRISTIAN PETERSEN

Devin's first four pro bouts were in Tijuana when he was just 17 years old. In total, 10 of his first 15 fights were in Mexico, where he was often facing grown men. "I'm not so sure the guys I was fighting down there were always telling the truth about their age and their record," he joked. "When I told everyone I was going to Mexico, they told me not to go, that I'll get robbed. It's not easy to go down there and win, but I told myself not to listen to them and went anyway." Wise beyond his years, Haney had a plan. He brought a film crew with him to Tijuana to record his fights there. Not only would the footage serve as a learning tool for his team to review later – not to mention valuable evidence in the event of a robbery on the cards – but also as a tool to promote himself. His team produced polished videos of the bouts and uploaded them to his YouTube channel. He quickly developed a following there.

After nine fights in 2016 and seven in 2017, Haney fought less in 2018 but stepped up the opposition. He was set to make his American cable debut on a ShoBox card in January against Filipino Harmonito Dela Torre, yet the bout was scrapped due to visa issues. He had to wait until May to face hard-hitting Louisiana native Mason Menard on ShoBox instead. Devin made a splash before the fight even began, as Bay Area rap legend E-40 walked him to the ring. He dominated the action until Menard's corner threw in the towel after the ninth round.

Next up was the Burgos fight. This time, rapper Kevin Gates walked him to the ring. Other than a cut on his forehead from an accidental headbutt, Haney coasted to a virtual shutout decision win. It may have looked easy to the viewers at home, but Burgos gave the blue-chip prospect his toughest fight yet. "He was experienced and durable," said Haney. "He had tricks up his sleeve." Burgos had previously challenged Mikey Garcia and Hozumi Hasegawa for world titles; in beating him, Haney proved he was a legitimate contender. The Ring, WBA and IBF agree, as they currently rank him in the top 10 of their lightweight ratings.

Devin feels that 2019 will be the year he makes his mark on the division.

"I believe that I'm ready for a title shot now. By the end of this year, I want to be a world champion," said Haney, who dominated previously unbeaten South African fringe contender Xolisani Ndongeni to a 10-round decision in his first bout of the year, a ShoBox main event televised from Shreveport, Louisiana on Jan. 11.

Haney believes a title-elimination bout in the summer is next. He would like to be in a mandatory position for a major lightweight belt by late 2019 because he won't be able to make 135 pounds for very long.

"Eventually I'm going to go up in weight, because I'm only 20, my body is still growing. I can only make 135 pounds for another year, maybe two years at most. I want to win a world title at lightweight and then move up," he said.

"A lot of the top guys are moving up (to 140 pounds) and creating vacancies. Mikey (Garcia) is moving up to fight (Errol) Spence, Jorge Linares is moving up. That means I'll be moving up the ratings soon."

Right now, a world title is the goal. In the future, Haney envisions having a big homecoming title defense in the Bay Area in front of hometown fans. Beyond that, he wants to become a pay-per-view star, taking on the best fighters of his generation. But who will be the big names for him to face in the big events?

One fighter Devin keeps an eye on is fellow undefeated lightweight prospect Ryan Garcia (17-0, 14 KOs), whom he fought several times in the amateurs with mixed results. "He beat me the first few times we fought, because he had more fights and more experience, but I beat him a few times as I got older," said Haney. "In my last tournament before turning pro, I gave him an eight-count and beat him pretty bad."

Haney believes it's too early for a professional fight between the two but certainly wants it to happen down the road. "I feel like one day that's going to be a pay-per-view fight. Right now he's doing his thing; I can't knock him, he's getting a lot of attention," he said. "I like Ryan, but of course I feel like I'm the more talented fighter. When we fight in the pros, I'm getting the W."

Could a Haney-Garcia fight series be the next generation's Canelo-Golovkin? Only time will tell. In the meantime, Devin continues to hone his craft every day, currently working with former three-division titleholder Mike "The Bodysnatcher" McCallum. A self-described gym rat, Haney rarely takes a day off and likes to train all over. "I like to go to different gyms and see different atmospheres," he said. "Floyd's gym (in Las Vegas) has been my main gym, and he's been a mentor and adviser to me. But I've gone to the Wild Card in Los Angeles, SNAC and a bunch of other places too. The longest I've ever been out of the gym since I started boxing was two weeks."

It's hard to describe Haney in just one phrase; he is a new breed of fighter. A gym rat that went pro at 17, promotes himself and built his brand almost entirely on social media. Could this be a new template for the 21st century prizefighter? One thing is for certain, wherever he goes in his professional boxing career, he will do it his way. RING

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram via @MonteroOnBoxing. His weekly podcast 'The Neutral Corner' can be heard on iTunes, Stitcher and SoundCloud.

A HOME AT THE TOP

JESSICA MCCASKILL'S FEARLESS PURSUIT OF SUCCESS HAS ITS ROOTS IN HARD TIMES OF THE PAST

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Jessica McCaskill doesn't need to be told about the impact she's had since becoming the WBC junior welterweight titleholder in October of last year. All she needs to do is walk down the street in Chicago and see her face on the side of a city bus with the caption "From Homeless to Champion."

But it really hit home for her when she went into work after she upset Argentina's Erica Anabella Farias to earn her first world title. As she showed off her belt, McCaskill got the usual reactions, except for one in particular. »

In just her eighth pro fight, Jessica McCaskill (left) seized a world title with a unanimous decision over veteran Erica Anabella Farias.

A HOME AT THE TOP

"One guy was choked up," she recalled. "And he said, 'I'm going through cancer right now, and this is something that keeps me motivated.' I had no clue that those two worlds could be connected like that. Those are the really touching moments, when I can help somebody get through something like cancer treatments. It's very inspirational."

It's not just that McCaskill won a world title in just her eighth pro fight. Or that she did it while still working a day job as a regulatory reporting analyst for brokerage firm R.J. O'Brien & Associates. Maybe it's because after battling homelessness as a child, she took on the worlds of business and boxing with equal ferocity, refusing to take "No" for an answer.

Whatever it is, though, she embraces her new role as a champion in and out of the ring.

"I definitely wanted to use myself as a light for other people – from big things to small things, from somebody having a bad day and I'm able to make them laugh or smile to sharing my story and them getting something out of it."

Strictly from a boxing standpoint, McCaskill has put together one of the great stories in recent years, a tale her peers in the sport could take some lessons from. But there's more to it than going from obscurity to a world title in the ring.

McCaskill could have easily been a statistic, a child lost to the streets or the system as she and her brother found themselves living in the back of a St. Louis church after the great-aunt who raised them went through a divorce that left the trio homeless and without the money to change that situation. The fourth-grader survived that harrowing stretch, but even as McCaskill and her family bounced back and settled into "normal" life in Belleville, Illinois, there was no indication that a fighter was being born.

In fact, it wasn't until she was 24 that she first laced up the gloves after being invited to take a kickboxing class by a friend back in St. Louis. Kickboxing didn't click for McCaskill, but boxing did, and she went on to pick up a trio of Golden Gloves titles while compiling a 23-3 amateur record. The pro game wasn't exactly crying out as a lucrative next step, but when the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville graduate relocated to Chicago in 2012 to take the job with R.J. O'Brien & Associates, she met coach/manager Rick Ramos, and new doors ultimately opened that made her realize that chasing after glory in the punch-for-pay ranks was a possibility. It was a tough transition in a lot of ways, but she was used to tough transitions by now.

"I moved here from St. Louis, which is only four-and-a-half, five hours away, but coming to a big city and you don't know anybody and you're kind of doing a whole new life, you just have to be fearless," McCaskill said. "And in boxing, you're going into a ring, you don't have headgear on, you're basically asking for somebody to punch you in the face, so you have to be a little crazy/fearless to do that as well."

By August 2015, McCaskill was turning pro with a second-round TKO of Tyrea Duncan, but there was no indication that five fights later she would be making noise about calling for a WBA lightweight title fight with Irish star Katie Taylor.

McCaskill's bold challenge of lightweight champion Katie Taylor – whom nobody was lining up to face – was testament to her fighting spirit.

Yet McCaskill and Ramos had a vision and they were willing to do whatever it took to make it real, whether through social media or at the negotiating table.

"Rick said we could fight this girl, we could beat her, we could win, and he's really big on repetition," said McCaskill. "I don't know if he knows this (laughs), but he repeats things a lot, and so it builds in your system and your soul, and I watched tape (on Taylor) and I totally agreed.

"He knows how to work the social media angles," she continues. "He knows how to put things out there in a way that people listen and they either love it or they hate it and they'll comment, and that's how things go viral. So once he put his mind-set to that fight, I was with him all the way, and we just went ahead and did our thing with social media."

Surprisingly, she got the fight, traveling to England to battle the unbeaten Olympian in December 2017. The odds were stacked against her, but McCaskill was unbothered by those predictions or the glare of the media spotlight. Then the fight started, and she gave Taylor her toughest battle to date. When the 10 rounds were over, Taylor got the victory, but it was a lot closer fight than the judges' scorecards would indicate. Long story short, those who didn't know who Jessica McCaskill was before the bout certainly knew her when it was over. And if there was one word to describe her, it was "fearless," something she didn't learn in the ring, but in life.

"A lot of it definitely comes from my experiences when I was younger and some of the other things I've been through in my life," she said. "I feel very empowered through my faith to conquer anything and at least take on whatever's in front of me head-on."

After the Taylor fight, McCaskill and Ramos suddenly had something to work with in terms of their much higher public profile, but as is the custom in women's boxing, the bigger the name, the tougher it is to get fights.

"We had so many people ready to go for at least three – and possibly five – fights," McCaskill said. "We were getting in on the B-side of fights, filling in for people who had fallen out, and none of it came through."

As someone who has only been a pro since 2015 and subsequently not as jaded as some of her peers, was McCaskill surprised that she couldn't get a fight?

"It is a little surprising, because there are definitely people who are obviously holding on to what they have for fear of losing it and relishing in that time and space," she said. "I think there are male fighters out there who are kind of the same way. They put on a good enough show and they have just good enough fame and money to where they don't need to aspire to be greater or to do better or to perform better for the crowd. So that's definitely a path that you can go in this sport."

It's not a path McCaskill wants to tread, and neither does Farias, a longtime member of The Ring's women's pound-for-pound list. So they met on a DAZN-streamed card in Chicago, and after 10 rounds, McCaskill was a world champion.

And this champion isn't exactly looking to pad her record with easy marks. She has her own hit list and she's not shy about naming names, starting with Taylor, whom she would love to rematch at 135 or 140 pounds.

"I'd take on Heather Hardy," McCaskill said. "Amanda Serrano is an amazing fighter and I'd be honored to fight against her. Cecilia Braekhus, we were in negotiations for a while for a December 8 fight and there were a lot of hands in the pot, so it didn't work with that. I was going to try to take all five of her belts. At 140, (Ana Laura) Esteche, (Anahi Esther) Sanchez, (Victoria Noelia) Bustos – all of those girls. The Argentineans definitely put on a tough fight; they withstand a lot of pressure, so those would be good, entertaining fights as well. And Layla McCarter, she's a fight we're looking at."

Braekhus. Taylor. Serrano. McCarter.

"Fearless" is a good moniker to replace "CasKILLA." But "The Unicorn" might be even better, because in women's boxing, McCaskill is proving to be one of a kind. That's high praise for someone with such a short resume, but it's not something that will get to her head, because this 34-year-old doesn't have the time to get complacent.

It's up at 4 a.m., in the gym by 5 a.m., in the office by 6 a.m., running at noon, more training after work and then she does it all again the next day. McCaskill even went to work the Monday after her title fight with Farias. And now she's navigating the shark-infested waters of the boxing world. And winning.

"A lot of it comes from Rick Ramos," McCaskill said. "He's always expected so much. He says, 'If this isn't possible, make it possible. MacGyver the situation.' And I've always prided myself on being innovative and figuring it out. That's how I go through life on a daily basis."

In other words, she lives up to the tagline of the aforementioned Chicago city bus ad:

"Defy Expectations." RING

STEPHEN MCCARTHY

FIGHT ROUNDUP

Tony Harrison was more Motor City Cobra than Detroit Tiger against Jermell Charlo, but his jab-and-move tactics were enough to lift the WBC 154-pound title from the favored Texan.

PHOTO BY ANTHONY GEATHERS

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

BY BRIAN HARTY

TONY HARRISON UD 12 JERMELL CHARLO

Dec. 22, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York

Thirty seconds into the fight to defend his junior middleweight title, Jermell Charlo backed Tony Harrison up for the entire width of the ring with a double-jab, double-hook, overhand right combo on footwork so nimble it would've gotten a fist-bump from Gregory Hines. Not much else happened in that round, but remember, this was the same Charlo who spent two minutes staring at Erickson Lubin before swatting him down for a first-round knockout. Charlo takes his time until he doesn't, and in Harrison he was facing a guy who'd been stopped by Jarrett Hurd in his only other title challenge and then only managed a split decision over a 40-year-old Ishe Smith in his last outing. This fight would end just as suddenly; just give it time.

It was also the Charlo who was taken the distance by a gatekeeper version of Austin Trout just six months earlier, however. Consistency is an issue, especially when considering all the hype around Jermell and his older (by one minute) brother Jermall, who would be appearing next in the main event.

Other dangerous-looking combinations, scary uppercuts and loaded-up hooks complete with battle cries would follow against Harrison, but often they were avoided, blocked or they just plain missed. It was the more subtle challenger who would go beyond appearances and actually land punches, mostly left-hand counters and what would be his most consistent weapon: an accurate, stabbing jab. In the third round, he added a follow-up straight right that found its mark a couple times. It *really* found the mark in the fifth, when the fight's first big score

stumbled Charlo and triggered a brief firefight, though a rainbow-sized right that dropped on Harrison's shiny dome at the end was enough to sway the round toward the Texan on two of the judges' cards.

The pace quickened after that but only occasionally rose above workmanlike. The aggressive Charlo had his moments – especially in the last round when he landed a left hook that definitely put a fog in Harrison's eyes – while the challenger stuck to fundamentals and relied heavily on his jab, leaving the classic "what style do you prefer" choice in the judges' laps. The panel pretty much agreed on who won which rounds, though, much to Charlo's (and maybe even Harrison's) astonishment: 116-112, 115-113 and 115-113 for the man from Michigan.

A distraught Charlo claimed robbery at the post-fight press conference, probably feeling the loss of a unification bout with Hurd as much as the loss to Harrison. There's a rematch clause in the contract, so expect it to happen.

JERMALL CHARLO UD 12 MATVEY KOROBOV

Dec. 22, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, New York

On the heels of his twin's upset loss, middleweight Jermall Charlo found himself facing a very different kind of jab. Matvey Korobov's rhythmic stick was not a weapon but a roadblock – the best way to keep a Charlo at arm's length is to put an extended arm between you and him. It was also a hypnotist's pendulum that kept the Texan guessing about when his southpaw opponent would deploy his real weapon, the straight left.

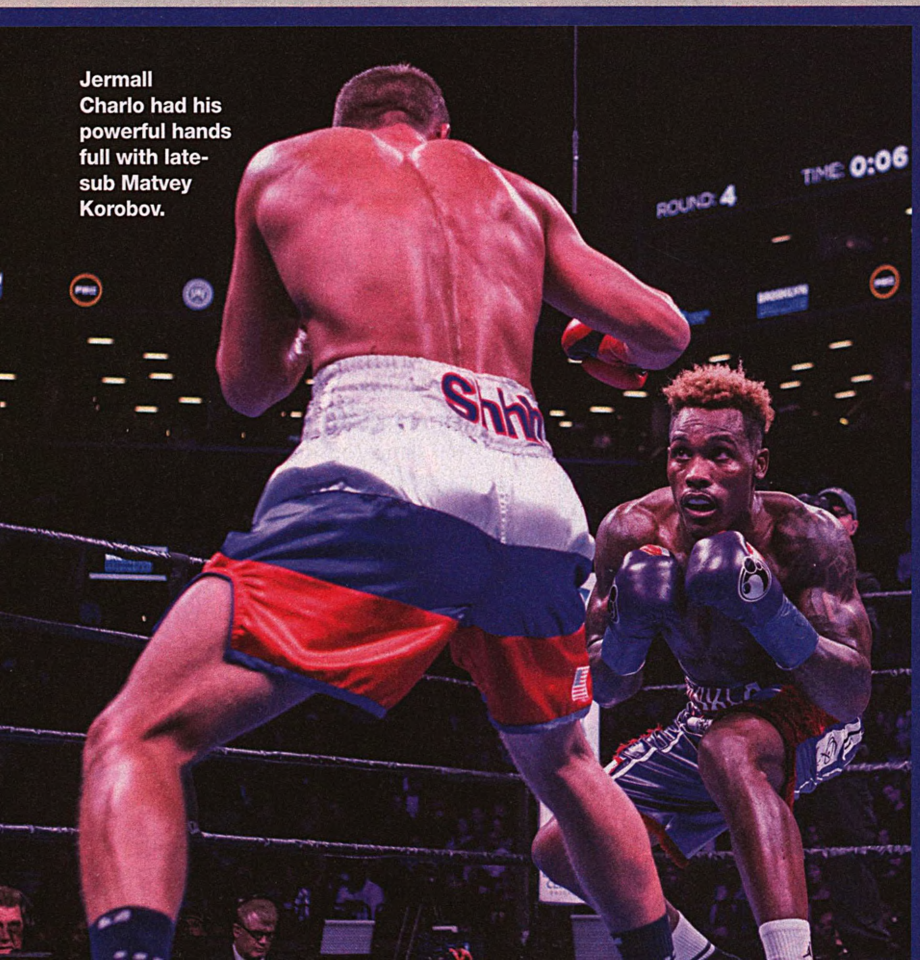
Charlo definitely saw or already knew that Korobov's shoulders were very stiff, and that when he threw the left it took his entire upper body with it, thus serving up his juicy head for a left-hook counter. Korobov's left was also surprisingly quick, accurate and unpredictable, though – often thrown without the jab prelude – and Charlo got smacked in the face a lot by it, maybe because he was thinking too much.

To be fair, Charlo was dealing with an unexpected learning curve after his original opponent, Willie Monroe Jr., dropped out just a few days before the fight. His straight right was landing nicely and his timing was dialing in by the middle rounds – plus it must be said that his jab was a real factor – and like his brother he's fond of packing a lot of his energy into the first 30 seconds of a round.

But neither he nor Korobov was accomplishing much of substance, and unless "boo" has taken on a new meaning in Brooklyn, the crowd saw it the same way. There weren't many "ooh" or "ahh" moments, just the occasional "U! S! A!" chant, which is the audience equivalent of weather talk when there's an uncomfortable lull in the conversation, or the writer equivalent of making dumb jokes when there's no real action to write about. Charlo was winning, though.

And then the 12th round happened. After an impassioned speech from trainer Charlie Mooney, Korobov came out with renewed intent while Charlo, who would later say he was channeling the injustice done to his brother earlier that night, was bent on winning with a statement. Midway through the round, with desire working both for and against him, Korobov was blindsided by a giant left hook that nearly caused his legs to disintegrate. He would sustain several more staggering power punches as Charlo pursued the finishing blow, but somehow remained upright and even recovered enough to go on the offensive before the final bell. Overall he'd proved himself to be a much tougher opponent than Charlo probably expected.

Charlo (28-0, 21 KOs) didn't look happy with his performance as he waited for the decision, but he was safe from his brother's fate. He won by two scores of 116-112 and one glaringly anti-Korobov tally of 119-108, and will now watch with great interest how things pan out between Canelo Alvarez and Daniel Jacobs in May.



Jermall Charlo had his powerful hands full with late-sub Matvey Korobov.

BILL TOMPKINS

MASAYUKI ITO TKO 7 EVGENY CHUPRAKOV

Dec. 30, Ota-City General Gymnasium, Tokyo

You can tell by watching him work that Evgeny Chuprakov is a tough guy, and you can tell just by looking at him that he's also a "tough guy." The cynical wrinkles on the Russian's forehead are evidence that he is permanently unimpressed by the dangers of life. His opponent on December 30, Masayuki Ito, is more comfortable with ... well, rules ... but the junior lightweight titleholder from Japan showed that he can beat down the bully if needed.

From the start, Chuprakov lowered his head and charged at Ito as if magnetically attracted to him, which made sense given the challenger's significant disadvantage in height and reach. But not much effective work came from the flail-and-grab strategy, as Ito was able to contort himself defensively in whatever breathing room he had to avoid damage. Instead, a lot of time was spent on crude grappling. Chuprakov was only occasionally successful with the chopping overhand rights he threw while rushing into the next clinch.

Ito did his best to create space for hooks and heavy straight rights that were consistently accurate, but he was showing signs of frustration after an unsurprising headbutt opened a cut above his eye in the third round. He was learning, though, and perhaps melded his insight to his anger to step up his bad-boy game. He began to push Chuprakov around and did more work with uppercuts and body shots, also timing hooks for when he popped out of a clinch.

Maybe as a reaction to Ito's improvement on the inside or maybe just to be weird, Chuprakov switched to fighting from a distance and adopted a stance that resembled a person on a surfboard. The intent was apparently to draw Ito in and score with sweeping counterpunches, and some of the Russian's best punches did indeed land during this new open-air approach, but overall it was a huge mistake. It was totally Ito's comfort zone, and his more accurate, more sophisticated punching – which he delivered in high volume – rapidly turned the fight into a rout. A series of body punches had Chuprakov wincing and trying to hold in the seventh, but Ito corralled him in a corner and unloaded until referee Laurence Cole stepped in. There was some confusion as it seemed like Cole was trying to tell one of Chuprakov's team to get off the apron so the fight could continue, but they were actually there because they were trying to throw in the towel.

Next up for Ito (25-1-1, 13 KOs) will probably be American Olympian Jamel Herring, who would be fighting in his first 12-rounder. Chuprakov (21-1, 10 KOs), bleeding from a pair of cuts around his left eye, was surely disappointed by his first loss but didn't protest the stoppage. He was maybe even a little impressed.

CALEB PLANT UD 12 JOSE UZCATEGUI

Jan. 13, Microsoft Theater, Los Angeles

This will sound familiar: You're watching a fight that has gone badly for the champion. He's hopelessly behind and there's one round to go. The only way he can dodge the upset and keep his title is to empty the tank and go for a knockout. Your butt is on the precipice of your couch and you're thinking the next three minutes are going to be epic. And then ... it's the most uneventful round of the night. Yet another reminder that we can never know what a fighter is feeling or what he is thinking, no matter how many times we wonder out loud.

Not that we'll stop doing it. In Uzcategui's case, he was clearly pretty exhausted by that point. But the IBF super middleweight titleholder also probably knew that he'd screwed up in underestimating his opponent and that his style simply wasn't going to work that night, and so he rode it out until the final bell.

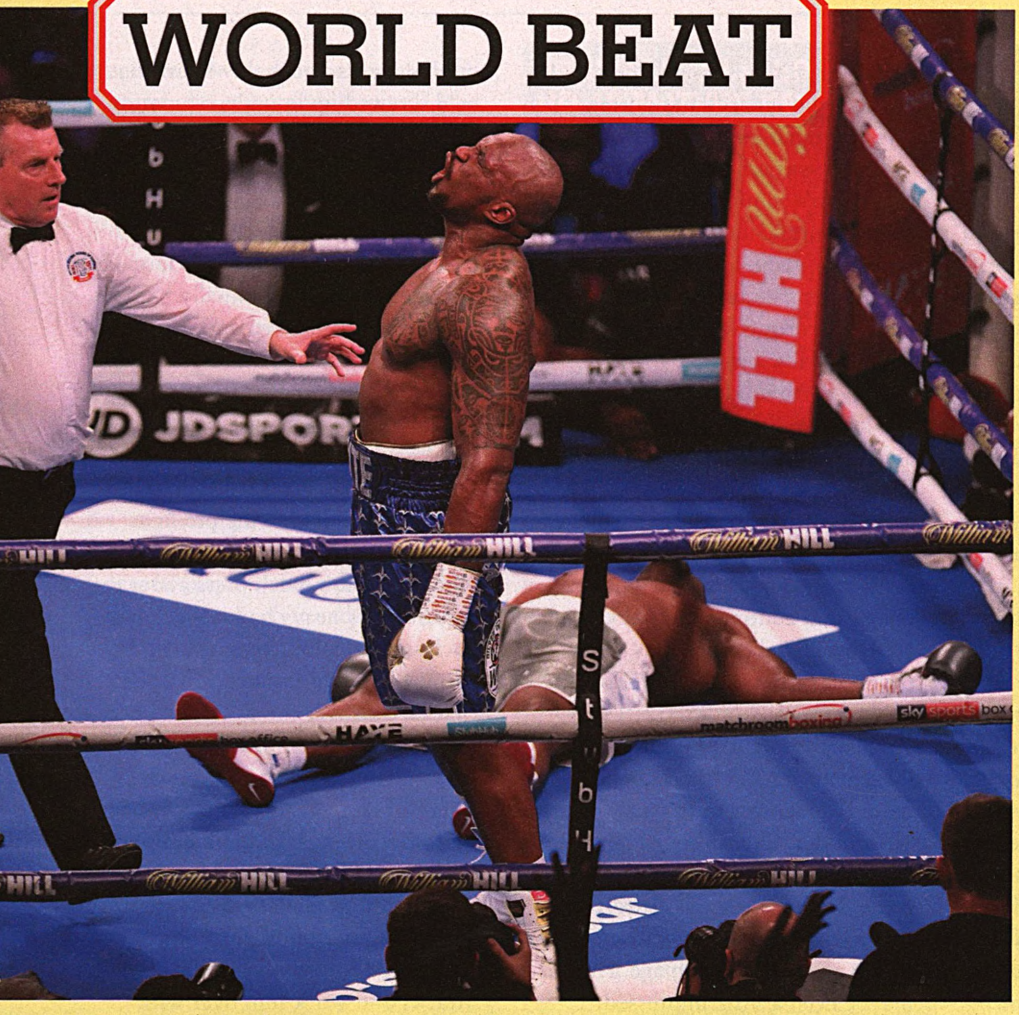
The opening round was as familiar as the 12th would eventually be: Uzcategui was relaxed and patient, fighting like the odds-favorite who had pummeled Andre Dirrell to an eighth-round stoppage a year ago. The knockout would come, said his body language. Plant was wired by contrast, and despite the pre-fight trash talk looked like an underdog who'd read too much press about the Venezuelan's heavy hands – leaning back stiffly, jabbing tentatively.

But Plant had insisted for weeks that he'd deliver the upset, and his reluctant posture quickly revealed itself as more of a game plan than a sign of danger. He repeatedly lured Uzcategui into loading up with power shots, then stood in the pocket and used his trio of superior reflexes, upper-body movement and handspeed to slip his opponent's attacks and work him over with body shots and short left hooks. One such hook put the titleholder down in the second, and another did the same in the fourth. By the middle of the fight, Uzcategui was already in do-or-die territory and his corner was beseeching him to throw more punches.

Uzcategui did manage to turn up the heat in bursts and won some later rounds – even seemed to have his opponent in trouble after rotating his head with a pinpoint left hook in the ninth – but was always shut down by Plant's determination and speed, and any desperate haymaker was easily avoided by the soon-to-be titleholder from Tennessee.

Plant, who'd fixated on winning a world title for years and through some very tough times, knew he'd won even before the final bell, but it still didn't prepare him for the words that followed the scores of 116-110, 116-110 and 115-111. Upon hearing "... and the new," he fell to his knees and wept. Yet another reminder.

WORLD BEAT



Dillian Whyte unleashes a victory shout after flattening Dereck Chisora in the 11th round of their rematch.

'BIG BABY' PURSUES 'AJ' SHOWDOWN

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

Fierce heavyweight debate from promoters and fans marked a slow start to the new year in the U.K. after an action-packed final month of 2018. Over came Jarrell Miller from New York in December, hovering around at the Dillian Whyte-Dereck Chisora rematch in London, perhaps being positioned by Eddie Hearn as Anthony Joshua's first opponent in the United States in 2019.

Miller, who had already upset Joshua in New York at the news launch of streaming service DAZN by saying that he wanted to take the Briton's mother "on a date," this time offered a new description of the unified (IBF/WBA/WBO) titleholder as "the Barbie doll of the division" who, he said, will need "a bulletproof joke vest" in the USA when they fight.

"Someone had to push his buttons," said Miller. "When you are babysat for your entire career and you think you are the king, it's a shock when someone steps up to you and shows you that you're less than a speck of dirt on their window. I don't put on a front or act; I call him the Barbie doll of the heavyweight division. I am more like the Penguin from Batman, the big bad villain.

"If you can't handle a mum joke, then you are never going to survive in Brooklyn or Queens. If he signs a contract with me, he will need a bulletproof joke vest, because I will be coming with them nonstop."

By the time you read this, Joshua-Miller may have been announced and April 13 at Wembley Stadium may have been abandoned, as there was a strong sense at the time of going to press that the stars are aligned for a May or June encounter at Madison Square Garden.

In my view, Miller is a very good opponent for Joshua, accomplished and comfortable in the fight arena, and this could create some spectacle. Don't rule out Miller creating an upset.

Truth is, though, it is high time Joshua made the ocean crossing to fight. He is huge in the U.K., but as Bob Arum pointed out to me when he made the trip to London to promote Amir Khan versus Terence Crawford in mid-January: Until Joshua gets in front of a U.S. audience, he will not have leverage there. Octogenarian Bob has seen it all, remember.

Arum insisted that Tyson Fury is a bigger draw in the U.S. now than Joshua in spite of the fact that "AJ" holds three world title belts. "All I know is Anthony Joshua does not resonate in the United States. He's been successful in the U.K., but his fights being in the afternoon in the U.S. gets a small audience. If people in America are asked for the No. 1, some would say Wilder, some would say Fury – and fewer would say Joshua," explained the 87-year-old.

"If you asked them who is the best heavyweight in the U.K., overwhelmingly they would say Fury, because Joshua has not been exposed in the United States. You've got to bring him over and show him. Even if he makes less, and maybe you don't put him on pay-per-view right away, his promoter, Eddie Hearn, has to find a way to get him on network TV

JUSTIN SETTERFIELD

or on ESPN and get eyeballs on him. DAZN does not have a big audience. Unless you shoot for that, Joshua [isn't going to be a major draw]. That's the truth."

Meanwhile, the sport's paying punters and armchair fans ranted and raged about Joshua and Hearn avoiding Wilder, Fury and even Whyte.

That December 22 fight night brought a first on British shores: two rival pay-per-view events on the same night, in London and Manchester. It was unheard of. And a promotional declaration of war. The rivalry between boxing promoters is as old and unforgiving as between the champions trading leather in the ring, but few feuds come close to that between Frank Warren and Hearn. It divided the audience neatly down the middle.

Warren's card in Manchester featured IBF featherweight champion Josh Warrington headlining against Northern Irishman Carl Frampton on BT Sport Box Office, the same channel that had aired Fury against Wilder three weeks earlier. At London's O2 Arena, Hearn hosted the heavyweight rematch between Whyte and Chisora. Sky Sports Box Office was the broadcaster.

Warren, a long-term promotional rival of Hearn's father, Barry, going back 30 years, announced Warrington-Frampton in September; Hearn announced his for the same date in mid-November.

To Warren, an unspoken code, if one ever truly existed, had been broken. But it was an internecine rivalry. Hearn insisted it was "absolute rubbish" that he tried to sabotage Warren's show. So what did rival promoters do in the past? "They wouldn't let shows happen in the city within 14 days of each other," Warren told me. "They had a policy. Certainly no two shows on the same night. Why would you want it to happen? You're hurting yourself. It's ridiculous. It doesn't benefit anybody. It's no good to the sport."

Even so, Hearn, it seems, is laying down the gauntlet, having already revealed that he could have "50 events or more" in 2019, given his deals with Sky, and DAZN in the USA and Italy. There could be "loads of clashes," he said, in terms of venues and dates, as the appetite for fights continues to grow. It could just be the opening skirmish in a long and bitter conflict.

As it was, the two concurrent pay-per-view headliners delivered. And then some. In Manchester, there was a featherweight classic as Josh Warrington propelled himself toward elite level with a demolition of 2016 Fighter of the Year Carl Frampton. The Yorkshireman added to his victory over Lee Selby with a ruthless, relentless bombardment of Frampton, leaving his opponent hurt and dizzy over 12 stanzas.

In London, Whyte turned the heat on heavyweight world champion Joshua from the ring apron after a chilling left hook finish in the 11th round against Dereck Chisora. After delivering that statement, Whyte called out rival Joshua for a rematch at Wembley Stadium in April, and although it is a possibility, chances of it actually happening are waning.

"I can't sit around and wait for Joshua," said Whyte. "My career needs to progress. Time's ticking. We were supposed to hear about fighting Joshua directly after Wilder-Fury, and there's nothing. The guy's making a lot of money, he's got four belts (Note: The Ring does not recognize the IBO title); I don't think he really cares. It's about what he's doing. He's the man at the moment. I'm sure Eddie doesn't want the golden egg to get cracked." They were pithy statements.

Whyte did rattle Joshua with his comments, and the latter now finds himself in a different, arguably

RICHARD HEATHCOTE

Is Whyte still in line to face Anthony Joshua, or will Jarrell Miller take his place?

difficult place as the year turns. From Olympic gold medalist in 2012 to going 22 fights undefeated and claiming three of the world title belts, Joshua has barely put a fist or foot wrong, yet there is a growing restlessness over his business-first approach.

So restless, in fact, that Joshua was shouted down – a first – by the packed audience at the O2 Arena when he climbed to the ring apron to respond to Whyte and tell his rival and the British public that he wanted the best in order: Wilder, Fury and then Whyte.

Little wonder, then, that Whyte is now peddling his warrior skills elsewhere. On the day Khan and Crawford met in London (Khan admitting it was "a calculated decision of legacy over money" to face the man from Omaha), I crossed paths with Warren, Fury's promoter, who scuttled news that Hearn had offered his fighter a 60-40 split of the purse to face Joshua for three of the world heavyweight titles and vacant Ring championship (as it would involve the division's No. 1 vs. No. 2) on April 13 at Wembley Stadium.

"It's nonsense," Warren told me. "Hearn did make an offer to Fury, but it was derisory. It would have to be 50-50 anyway," said the promoter, who added that talks for Fury to fight Wilder in a rematch have made steady progress. By the time you read this, that will have all played out and we will know the landscape for six months.

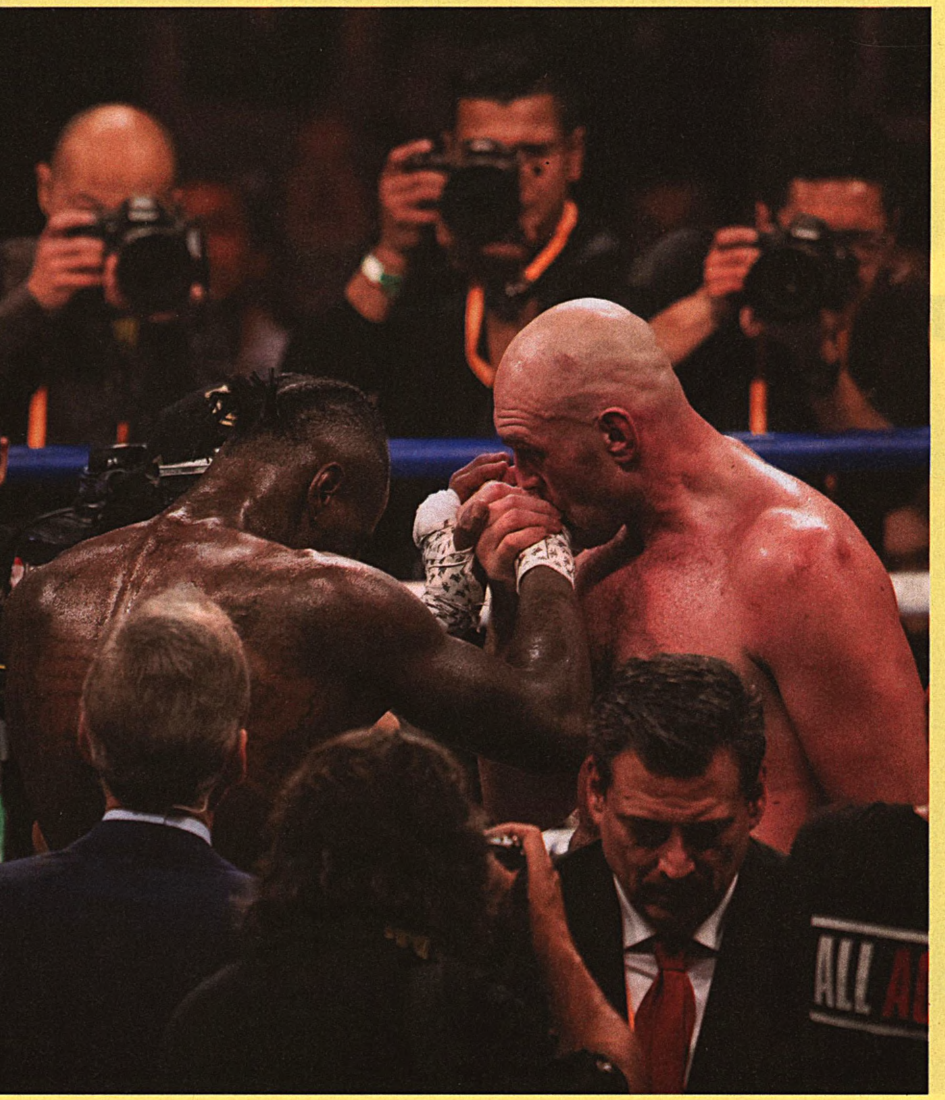
★★★

Elsewhere, it was also an emotional night at the London venue on December 22 for Charlie Edwards, the 25-year-old from Croydon, who boxed brilliantly to claim the coveted WBC flyweight title from the Nicaraguan Cristofer Rosales, dedicating the victory to his mother, Terry, who has suffered both cancer and brain disease in the last four years. She watched events unfold from a wheelchair at ringside, where her son won 118-110, 117-111, 116-112 in a landslide triumph. "I'm an emotional man, and it meant so much," Edwards told me. "We are a small family unit, very close-knit, and I wanted to do this for her. She's had to be more of a fighter than me in the last four years."

A week earlier, Mexican star Canelo Alvarez floored overmatched Briton Rocky Fielding four times in three rounds, torturing and targeting the Liverpudlian's body in a dominant victory at Madison Square Garden to become a player at super middleweight. Fielding, a huge underdog, had no answer to the brutal body attacks, the only plus being that he earned enough to pay off his home and support a young family.

But one line I will treasure from the last month came from the man who has seen it all. And more. In his gravel-tone voice, Arum offered the opinion that "the U.K. [boxing market] is as robust as I've ever seen it." Remember, the second fight Arum ever promoted was in England – Muhammad Ali's meeting with Henry Cooper at Arsenal's Highbury Stadium (their 1966 rematch). We'll take that. Cheers.

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for The London Telegraph



Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury are more likely to clash again before either fights Joshua.

FURY/WILDER: ANADOLU AGENCY

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

Upon returning to Manila, Donnie Nietes showed off a different set of moves than we're used to seeing. Instead of punches and feints, Nietes dished out leans and dabs alongside comedian Vhong Navarro on the noontime variety show *It's Showtime*.

While we wouldn't recommend he follow Sugar Ray Robinson into a post-boxing career as a dancer, his invitation to be on the show is indicative of his growing popularity in the Philippines.

Nietes, for all his accomplishments in years past, had been overshadowed by more dynamic, charismatic fighters, such as Manny Pacquiao and Nonito Donaire, and had never broken out as a star in his own right. Yet after joining Pacquiao and Donaire as the only Filipino fighters to win world titles in at least four divisions, it's becoming harder to ignore "Ahas'" contributions to Philippine boxing history.

Nietes had waited three months longer to lift the WBO junior bantamweight title he was denied in a dubious draw against compatriot Aston Palicte. The look of vindication on his face as he awaited the announcement on New Year's Eve following his 12-round fight against Kazuto Ioka bore that out. When the split decision went Nietes' way, he knew he wasn't just getting the title that was long overdue, but also the respect.

"Hopefully, years from now people will remember his name as one of the great fighters that has ever come out from the Philippines," said Michael Aldeguer, Nietes' promoter.

Becoming an entrant on The Ring's pound-for-pound list and a champion over four divisions is a long way from Nietes' days of being the janitor of the ALA Gym, feeding the pet snakes and sweeping the floors of the Cebu facility to earn his keep. As a 105-pounder, Nietes was overlooked as unmarketable in a sport that treats anyone under featherweight as if they were invisible.

But Nietes (42-1-5, 23 knockouts) persevered, becoming ALA's first champion when he outpointed Somporn Seeta for the WBO strawweight title in 2007. He moved up to 108 and became the Ring champion there, then stepped up again to outbox Komgrich Nantapech for the IBF flyweight title.

Through his longevity, Nietes has forced aficionados to take a look at him, though he has faced criticism for not having fought the few marquee names in the divisions he has passed through.

"People have asked, 'Why didn't Donnie fight the big names earlier in his career?' But who were the big names at 105, 108?," Aldeguer asked. "In fact, Donnie went to 112 for (Juan Francisco Estrada) and (Roman Gonzalez), but just when he won the title at 112, both Estrada and Chocolatito went up to 115."

Nietes faces no dearth of big name foes at 115 pounds, where Chocolatito Gonzalez and Estrada remain respected names, while titleholders include his *kababayan* (countryman) IBF beltholder Jerwin Ancajas, Ring/WBC champ Srisaket Sor Rungvisai and WBA incumbent Kal Yafai. Nietes says his dream fights are Gonzalez, Estrada and Sor Rungvisai; Aldeguer says give them anyone but Ancajas.

At age 36, Nietes may have already punched his ticket to the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Does he see the finish line in sight?

"I feel like I'm still 24," said Nietes.

★★★

Just over a month after his split decision loss to Carlos Licona, Mark Anthony Barriga (9-1, 1 KO) survived the Survival Camp (Jerwin Ancajas' compound in Cavite province, where boxers sleep outside on crude bunk beds among chickens and feral dogs) along with his cousin, amateur standout Charly Suarez, and assistant trainer, Delfin Boholst. Barriga, a 2012 Olympian,

Donnie Nietes' split decision over Kazuto Ioka solidified his place in Philippines boxing history.

Vic Saludar (left) won a bloody unanimous decision over Ryuya Yamanaka to lift the WBO 105-pound title in Kobe, Japan, last June.

was edged by Licona for the vacant IBF strawweight title on the undercard of the Deontay Wilder-Tyson Fury show on December 1.

Michael Dasmarinas (28-2-1, 19 KOs) has an opponent for his next fight as he begins to rehabilitate his standing at 118 pounds following a split draw with Manyo Plange in his last fight. The southpaw from Camarines Sur will face fellow Filipino Kenny Demecillo (14-4-2, 8 KOs) on March 29 in Singapore.

★★★

As my picks didn't make it to print in the last issue, here are my Filipino Boxing Awards for 2018:

- **Fighter of the Year:** Donnie Nietes
- **Fight of the Year:** Vic Saludar UD 12 Ryuya Yamanaka
- **Knockout of the Year:** Eugene Lagos KO 2 Emilio Sanchez
- **Upset of the Year:** John Vincent Moralde UD 8 Ismail Muwendo
- **Round of the Year:** Romero Duno-Gilberto Gonzalez, Round 6
- **Comeback of the Year:** Nonito Donaire

Ryan Songalia is a member of the Boxing Writers Association of America and can be reached at ryansongalia@gmail.com.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Two of our favorite sons, Hekkie Budler and Moruti Mthalane, saw action in Macau on New Year's Eve. It was only the second time that two South Africans defended world titles on the same night on foreign soil, the last time being in 1990 when Brian Mitchell and Welcome Ncita retained their belts in Italy.

★★★

Ring and WBA junior flyweight champion Hekkie Budler, after taking the title from Ryoichi Taguchi in an upset, had another mountain to climb, this time in the form of Taguchi's stablemate, undefeated former strawweight beltholder Hiroto Kyoguchi. With eight stoppages among his 11 victories, Kyoguchi made up in power what he lacked in experience.

That power difference was apparent from the start. Budler was busier in the opening frame, but when Kyoguchi landed two jabs, they connected with a thud. A hard left hook to the body made Budler respond with an uppercut-left hook combination. It was clear that Budler's plan was to outbox and outpunch his opponent while Kyoguchi was on a seek-and-destroy mission.

Budler showed his experience and boxed well in the early rounds. He moved in and out with quick flurries while Kyoguchi landed the odd power jab and hard left hook to the body. It was the familiar choice: Score for the busier ring general or the guy landing fewer but harder shots.

Kyoguchi started the fifth with more urgency. Budler continued peppering him with punches until the Japanese prodigy landed a hard left uppercut followed by a left hook. Budler tried to right the ship in the sixth with his superior work rate, but by the seventh round the fight had an ominous feel about it as the tide turned in favor of the challenger. Kyoguchi was landing cracking

JIJI PRESS

Moruti Mthalane, an 18-year veteran of the pro ranks, has not slowed down with age.

body shots and left uppercuts with regularity while Budler was bleeding badly from the nose.

Budler tried exchanging on the inside in the eighth, but he couldn't deter Kyoguchi. The South African was clearly feeling the effect of his opponent's power and was breathing hard through his mouth. An uppercut in the ninth shook him, forcing him to hold. He cleared the cobwebs and moved out of danger, but the writing was on the wall.

Budler tried to buy time in the tenth by getting on his bicycle but winced with every body shot he took. At the end of the round, his corner decided to pull him out and walked over to the Kyoguchi corner to congratulate the new champion. "We were behind," explained trainer Colin Nathan. "The last round, Hekkie was taking flush shots. I know his capabilities. He just couldn't turn it around."

★★★

It was up to The Ring No. 1-ranked flyweight, Mthalane, to save the day, and he did so in style, turning back the gutsy challenge of Masahiro Sakamoto to retain his IBF belt.

Little was known about the Japanese challenger except that he could crack (he'd scored nine knockouts in his 13 wins), and that his only loss was by majority decision to Sho Kimura, the only recognizable name on his record.

Mthalane started behind his jab and drove Sakamoto back with a right at the end of the first round. Sakamoto opened up in the second and a fight broke out. Mthalane landed crisp jabs followed by power shots while Sakamoto had some success with left hooks to the body.

That set the tone for the fight. Mthalane, with his compact defense, gloves held high, got in and out behind the jab and teed off with combinations to the head and body. Sakamoto kept throwing and made things interesting for a while, but the better technique and defense of Mthalane made the difference.

Sakamoto started marking up in the fifth, but every time Mthalane looked like he was overwhelming him, the challenger kept himself in the fight by firing back. Sakamoto's punches became more forced from the seventh onward, and one had to wonder what was keeping him on his feet. The 36-year-old Mthalane showed no signs of slowing down, battering Sakamoto toward the end of the eighth. Sakamoto landed a hard left uppercut to begin the next round, but it didn't buy him more than a few seconds, after which Mthalane stepped on the gas and continued to land a stream of punches.

In the 10th, after the doctor took a look at Sakamoto's rapidly closing right eye, the challenger threw a last-ditch salvo of wide power punches before Mthalane took over again, and it came as a relief when the Japanese fighter's corner decided to call it a day before the start of the 11th round.

Next up for Mthalane will be a mandatory defense against another Japanese challenger, Masayuki Kuroda, but the fight that he really wants is a unification showdown with WBC titleholder Charlie Edwards.

★★★

There were high hopes for 25-0 lightweight Xolisani Ndongeni to finally score that big breakout win by upsetting Ring-rated Devin Haney, but it was not to be.

Ndongeni overcame a second-round knockdown and Haney's attempt to close the show in the 10th, but never threatened the 20-year-old prodigy. The South African tried his best to turn the fight around in the later rounds, but in the end he was completely outclassed and lost a wide decision.

He showed grit and courage to last the distance, so hopefully he'll be back.

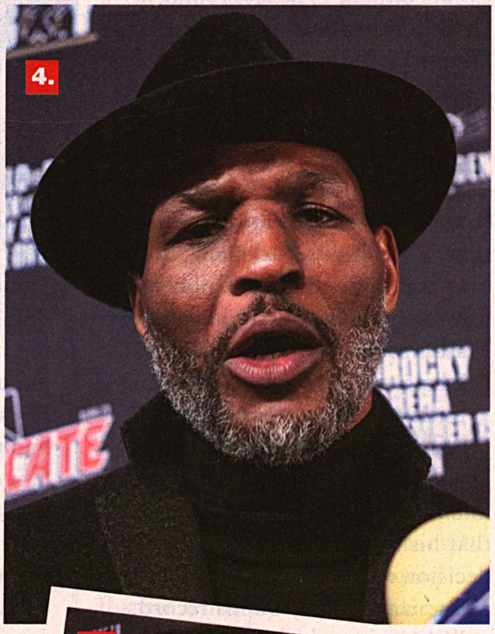
KEVIN LEE

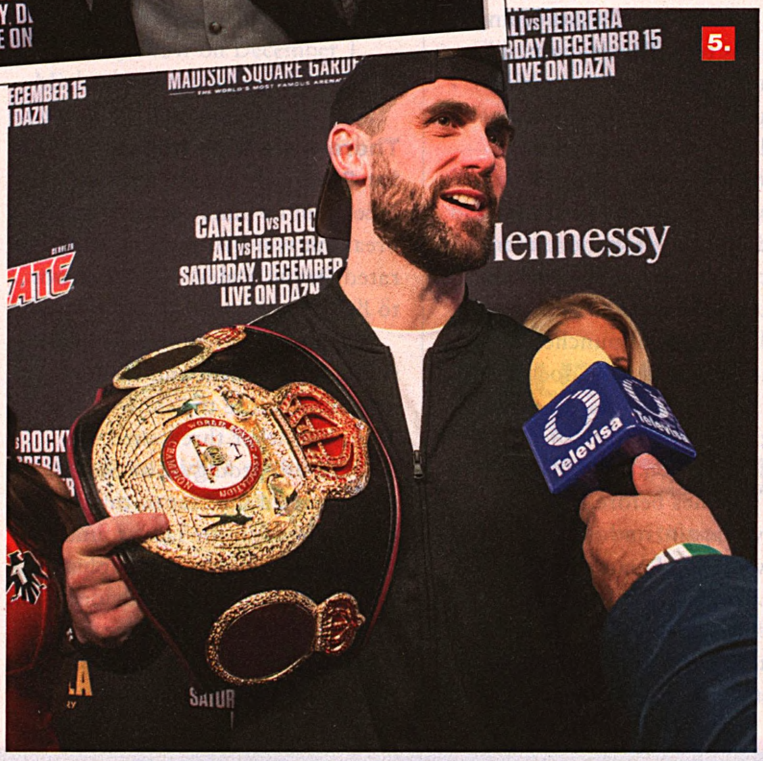
AT THE FIGHTS

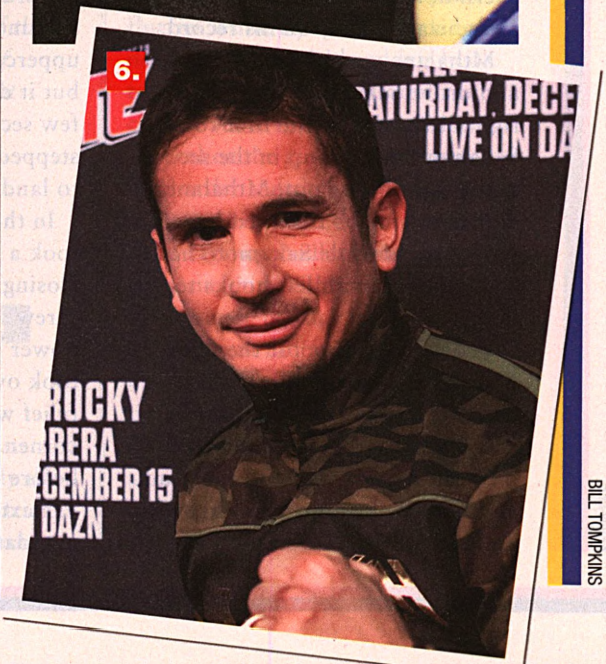
BY LAMAR CLARK

STYLES MAKE FIGHTS

Canelo Alvarez vs. Rocky Fielding Welcome Party:
1. Tureano Johnson
2. Sadam Ali
3. Oscar De La Hoya
4. Bernard Hopkins
5. Rocky Fielding
6. Mauricio Herrera







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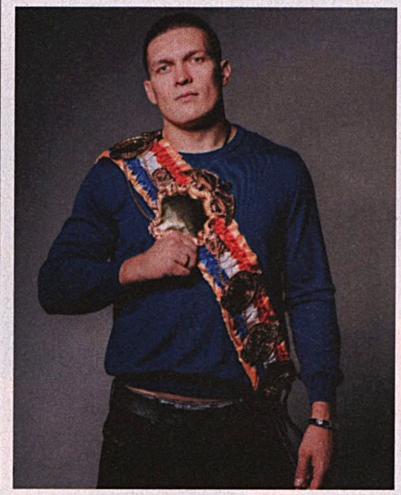

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WHEN SIZE DOESN'T MATTER

In March 1995, former undisputed lightweight champion Pernell Whitaker ventured into his fourth weight class in a bid to dethrone WBA junior middleweight titleholder Julio Cesar Vasquez. A showboating Whitaker was given a count in the fourth when Vasquez landed a quick flurry, but rose from the canvas with a smile on his face. "Sweet Pea" was mostly a step ahead in this battle of southpaws and prevailed via scores of 118-107, 118-110 and 116-110. Whitaker relinquished the 154-pound title almost immediately and returned to welterweight to defend his WBC crown. RING

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COMING UP

Shawn Porter, The Ring's No. 4-rated welterweight, makes the first defense of his WBC title against No. 8-rated Yordenis Ugas on March 9 in Carson, California.

MARCH

MARCH 9 – Shawn Porter vs. Yordenis Ugas, welterweights (for Porter's WBC title), Carson, California (Fox).
MARCH 16 – Errol Spence Jr. vs. Mikey Garcia, welterweights (for Spence's IBF title), Arlington, Texas (Fox PPV). Also, David Benavidez vs. J'Leon Love, super middleweights.
MARCH 23 – Miguel Berchelt vs. Francisco Vargas, junior lightweights (for Berchelt's WBC title), Inglewood, California (ESPN).
MARCH 24 – Lamont Peterson vs. Sergey Lipinets, welterweights, Oxon Hill, Maryland (Fox Sports 1).

APRIL

APRIL 12 – Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. TBA, lightweights (for Lomachenko's Ring, WBA and WBO titles), location TBA (ESPN).
APRIL 13 – Peter Quillin vs. Caleb Truax, super middleweights, Minneapolis, Minnesota (Fox Sports 1).
APRIL 20 – Terence Crawford vs. Amir Khan, welterweights (for Crawford's WBO title), location TBA (ESPN PPV).
APRIL 20 – Danny Garcia vs. Adrian Granados, welterweights, location TBA (Fox).

MAY

MAY 4 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Daniel Jacobs, middleweights (for Canelo's Ring, WBA and WBC titles, and Jacobs' IBF title), Las Vegas (DAZN).

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